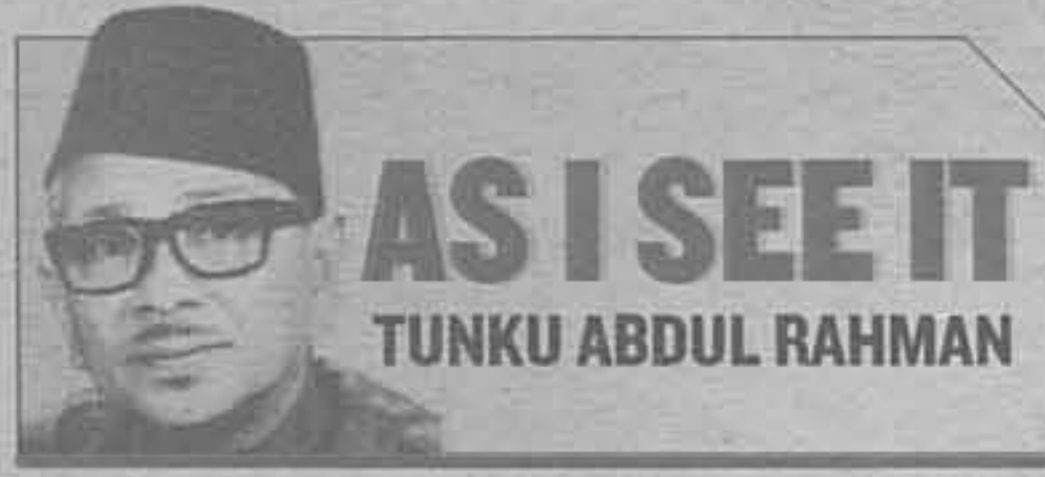


Life before and after merdeka

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In this article published on Oct 15, 1984, Tunku looked back at over two decades of independence and reminded Malaysians to be thankful for the peace and prosperity of the nation.



WONDER how many of the people living today can sum up the accruing benefits we received following Merdeka. Older people who had a part in the fight for independence will remember the situation before and after independence. They will remember, for instance, the condition of life of the Malay people in particular before independence. They will remember how bad the lot of the kampung people and those living in the remote areas had been.

As an example, in the early years of 1930 when I was District Officer of Kuala Nerang, I had to visit the areas considered far from the town. I name for instance my visit to Durian Burong.

It was difficult to judge the distance because it took all day to reach our destination through a jungle path. But recently when I covered the distance in a car, it took me about 20 minutes from Kuala Nerang to reach it. I couldn't believe that this was the same place.

Then in Pulau Langkawi there were no roads and no bridges. To reach one end of the island from the other, the easiest way was to go by boat, or on foot through bridle path. No thought or consideration was given to provide convenience for kampung people.

They were completely ignored, and it was for them to do what they could for themselves. The interior of the island was completely neglected.

But on the mainland, roads ran from one town to another and through big rubber plantations owned by European companies. These employed thousands of Indians brought from India and who were paid "starvation" wages. They toiled from early morning until noon.

There was no way in which the people could express themselves for there was no electoral representation for towns, municipalities or city councils.

The powers-that-be ran the country as they liked and "yes" men were appointed to the sanitary boards, town councils, municipalities, State councils and finally to the legislative councils. The only qualifications were money, positions in commerce or business or being bosses of estates or good professional careers. People were ignored and neglected.

Monopoly

When I was district officer in Sungei Petani, transport monopoly was introduced by the police chief, O'Connell, on a district-to-district basis. The only district in Kedah where the monopoly had not been implemented was Sungei Petani because I refused to allow it.

Holders of taxi licences were asked to surrender their licences and join the transport company but they were not given a fair share in the business. When asked how they would be remunerated or compensated for loss of earnings, I was told they would not be given employment in return for giving up their cars.

The company would have the right to employ new drivers and other employees as it deemed fit. Soon I was transferred to Kulim when the monopoly had been implemented.

Education was in a very shocking state. There were only a few schools for boys and the standard of education was so poor that those leaving school at the age of 12 to 13 years had no career to look forward to except, if lucky enough, to be taken on as office peons, policemen and labourers. The



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»We have not thought of independence merely as an end to itself, but the fulfilment of our dream of our Malaya in which all people will enjoy in full measure of peace, prosperity and happiness«

TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

bright boys, a few of them only, would be given places in English schools.

The kampungs in the interior were ridden with malaria and other diseases, and nothing was done to eradicate them. Any proposal for new items in the State budget would be rejected outright. In the towns, of course, people were able to live with better facilities for education and other amenities.

All the big heads of departments and government officials came from abroad, the home of the ruling race, and they were given special treatment and nice quarters to live in.

There were Malaysian Civil Service officers in the non-Federated Malay States — only a handful of Malay officers were taken on and they lived poles apart from their own less fortunate compatriots and found no time to mix with them.

In business, Malays had little or no share at all. The Chinese had to work hard in order to get rich. They had to scrape the bottom of the mine to get the tin after the dredging had taken the best there was by the foreign companies.

They, however, had come from a country

where they had to struggle to live, but the Malays, who had lived a life of ease in their own country, could never be made to struggle for a better living, and so they continued to lead a hand-to-mouth existence.

The treaties made between the States and the British Government were never treaties in the proper sense of the word. They were terms dictated by the ruling power to the Rulers — in other words lopsided treaties.

As proof, when Sir MacMichael demanded the abrogation of the treaties and the introduction of a new one which rendered all the Malay protected States a colony, the Rulers had no say except to sign away their rights. This was too much for the Malay people and when Datuk Onn rose to oppose it, the people joined him and rejected the Malayan Union.

A new Federation of Malaya agreement was signed and the Federation of Malaya was set up. But when the new government started operations, the Malays received nothing but crumbs from the table of the ruling power, though the Rulers and a few leaders were given positions. It was then that I stood up for independence: So we fought a constitutional struggle for it and won it.

In a speech I made over Radio Malaya on Aug 9, 1954, I said: "the Alliance is aware that hundreds of thousands of people live in the rural areas in the kampungs and villages. These kampungs and villages are so far away from post offices, police stations and health centres. These amenities should be brought to them."

In the first Budget speech on Dec 4, 1955, I laid stress on education. "Government has decided to establish a number of residential schools to absorb a number of education-starved boys and give them five years' secondary education. The Government is also doing all it can to assist in the legitimate expansion of the Chinese and Tamil schools, and granting aid to these schools by providing in the estimates of 1956."

In the speech at the Federal Council on March 6, 1959, I placed before the council "the plan for development which we regard as an accessory of independence. We have

not thought of independence merely as an end to itself, but also as a means to another and even greater end but the fulfilment of our dream of our Malaya in which all people will enjoy in full measure of peace, prosperity and happiness."

"The outlined development plan represents economic and social aspects of the Merdeka programme. It is meant to be the first cash plan of that happy and prosperous Malaya, which is our aim."

Now we can all see how much the Alliance and the Barisan Nasional have done for the people, so much so that Malaysia has been mentioned as the shining light of South-East Asia.

Business has grown to an extent that we who had lived in the pre-Merdeka period would never have dreamt about. The biggest change, however, was seen in the kampungs. Today the kampung boys who were deprived of opportunities are doing well in the government service, in the professions, in the universities and in commerce.

Political parties grew with ambitious politicians who attempted to outdo one another and in the scramble for positions they derided, belittled and criticised the party in power, but the Barisan Nasional has established itself with its broad-based and far-sighted policy. It could not be moved, still less removed from power.

Under the continuous Alliance rule and now the Barisan, the country has won a place in the world of developing and developed nations, and the people wherever they are have acquired sufficient education and wisdom to see what is good for them and for their country.

Above all, this is a multi-racial nation where people of different ethnic groups are living together with the best of understanding and goodwill.

The Malays realise that without the support of the non-Malays, we could never have overcome the barriers of divide-and-rule and won independence. For this reason, they have accepted each other as fellow citizens and are living at peace with one another.

Let us be content with what we have and thank Allah for His small mercies.