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Newspaper	News Straits Times
Date	15/1/2012

'A patient, hands-on leader'

VISIONARY: In the second part of a series on second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's 36th anniversary of his death yesterday, Tun Musa Hitam reminisces about the indelible mark Razak had made on the country and his life, writes Eunice Au

FORMER deputy prime minister Tun Musa Hitam, who was an assistant district officer in Kluang just after Malaysia's independence, had less than a week's notice before Tun Abdul Razak Hussein visited his district. He recalled the whole district was abuzz with excitement and the district officer was so nervous, he held a rehearsal to prepare for Razak's arrival. During that visit, Musa stood in line watching Razak arrive and shook hands with him — that was his first encounter with Razak. Popping by every district in the country was the norm for Razak as he was a very hands-on prime minister, Musa says.

On one visit to Kluang, Musa said the health officer had briefed Razak that the progress of the clinic was 75 per cent complete.

Without warning, Razak had suggested to check out the clinic in person and realised that the state of the clinic was not as reported.

"The health officer almost cried. He was shivering with fear, but Razak did not ask him whether he was lying or scold the officer.

"He did not need to because the officer was already shamed."

The unpredictability of Razak was one of his greatest traits, Musa said.

"Leaders and departmental heads would prepare so many things

to brief him, but Razak would suddenly ask questions that nobody expected.

"I have seen many a leader stumped," Musa says with a chuckle and adds: "People knew you could not fool Razak".

Later, Musa was appointed as the political secretary to the minister of transport, Tan Sri Sardon Jubir.

Due to the fact that a graduate was so rare in those days, people started to take notice of Musa and within a short while, Razak also had confidence in him.

Musa recalled being labelled one of 'Razak's boys' and accused of conspiring to topple Tunku Abdul Rahman.

"Razak never responded to the rumours and those of us branded as his 'boys' did not talk to him about what we were called.

"Malaysia was isolated politically at that time because Tunku Abdul Rahman was labelled as an imperial stooge; he was very British and Western-oriented."

Razak had sent delegations, which included Musa, to attend conferences held by the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation to establish contact with other nations.

The Afro-Asian movement was anti-West, so Razak's decision to send delegations to the conferences fuelled the intensity of the accusations.

However, Musa said Razak's decision then was spot on.

"He knew that we must have diplomatic contact with others and, in the long run, it has paid off."



Prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, accompanied by Dr Mohamed Nor Abdullah (right), then chairman and director-general of Rubber Industries Smallholders Development Authority, Tun Musa Hitam (left) and then Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia director Ani Arope (second from left) looking at one of the exhibits at the rubber smallholders development seminar at University of Agriculture, Serdang, in the 1970s.

Although Razak often gave Musa opportunity to have one-on-one talks with him, Musa said, there were no outward signs of their close relationship.

"I would meet him in his house or his office without any publicity.

"Razak was nice and willing to ask for opinions, especially from young upstarts like me.

"One beautiful thing was when he sat down with me once and told me 'Musa, you have got a good future, but you must be patient and do not worry.

"Just do your job and people will notice you."

"He made me feel important." Razak used to query Musa's opinions of people, asking: "Can he deliver? Can he work?"

That was the difference, Musa said, that set Razak apart from other leaders who would ask "Can he be trusted?"

"To Razak, results and performance was his measurement of success. If you cannot do your job, you are out."

When the May 13, 1969 racial riots happened, Musa said, Razak knew it was time for Tunku to go, but he did not plan to topple Tunku.

"His approach was to wait with patience."

As a leader, Razak always insisted on speed in implementation, but yet he was patient in character.

"Razak always talked calmly and never raised his voice. I have never seen him angry."

When Razak was a deputy prime minister, he would always make his speeches accompanied by coughs and the characteristic clearing of his throat.

"I think it was partly because he was nervous that he would say the wrong thing," Musa says on hindsight.

However, Musa said that when Razak stepped up as prime minister, the cough disappeared because Razak had full confidence in leading the nation.

"To this day, Razak's close friends and I talk to each other by imitating Razak's manner of speech to remind ourselves of him."

Tomorrow: Datuk Zakaria Ahmad's impression of Razak

"I have seen many a leader stumped."

Tun Musa Hitam

former deputy prime minister



Najib pays tribute to his late father

SELAMA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday paid tribute to his late father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein who died 36 years ago, for his untiring efforts to assist the poor.

"He was a leader with vision and also never stopped working for the benefit of the people and country until his death.

"Even when he knew he was suffering from an incurable disease (leukaemia), my father did not let family members, but chose to continue to work," he said at the Larut parliament mesra rakyat programme here yesterday.

"He did not want the family, in-

cluding my mother, to be worried about his health.

"I am pleased to note that Felda settlers have not forgotten his sacrifices.

"We have to strive to see Felda not only succeeds locally, but also becomes a champion in the international arena."