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Newspaper	The Star
Date	27/8/2013

A lasting impression of a prince and statesman

AS we approach our 56th Merdeka Day, my mind goes back to the day when I had my first encounter with our *Bapa Merdeka* and first Prime Minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

Two friends and I were spending our Hari Raya Aidilfitri at the university campus at Lembah Pantai as it was just a couple of weeks to our final examinations. Going home to celebrate Hari Raya was not our priority then.

The newspapers carried articles that the Prime Minister was holding an open house and we assumed that the food served there would certainly be better than the hostel food that we had every day.

Dressed casually in T-shirts, jeans, slippers and uncut hair, we made our way to the official residence of the Tunku.

We sauntered to the front entrance of the residence and arranged our slippers among the shiny expensive looking shoes of VIPs and dignitaries.

The Tunku saw us and immediately came to shake our hands and welcome us into the hall while enquiring who we were.

The foreign envoys and guests were temporarily stunned to see three improperly attired men joining the party.

Tunku, with his quick wit, laughingly intro-

duced us to the crowd as "university students who had come to apologise for holding demonstrations against the government earlier".

To those who are not familiar with those times, university students then had been regularly holding street demonstrations championing all kinds of causes.

Tunku graciously handed us plates and invited us to partake in the huge spread of food.

We sat among the visitors and were involved in discussions with some of them on our studies.

One of the visitors was Tan Sri Arshad Ayub, the first director of Institut Teknologi Mara (now known as UiTM), who had frank discussions with us and for whom I have deep respect until this day.

We bade goodbye to Tunku and the guests after the sumptuous breakfast and went back to our books.

The visit gave me a lasting impression of Tunku, a prince and statesman, who had love for all his countrymen and was always down to earth.

Several months later I had the opportunity to shake his hand again.

As the Chancellor of the university, he handed the scroll to me during my convocation.

**A. AKMAR
Ampang**

