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# Remembering the Tunku's vision

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Tunku made it quite clear his belief in liberty could not exist side by side with communism.



**A great honour:** Tunku making a visit to the general hospital in Alor Setar on Aug 16, 1966 to reward policeman Chan Sau Chang who was injured during a communist ambush.

EVERY February since 2010 we at Ideas hold an event to commemorate the birthday of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Alhaj. He was born on Feb 8, 1903 and he would have been 113 this year.

We will be holding a special dinner to mark his birthday on Feb 20. This will also be a celebration of the sixth anniversary of Ideas.

This year our celebration is a bit different. We are lucky to have been chosen as the host for this year's Asia Liberty Forum (ALF), an annual gathering of the freedom movement from across Asia to discuss challenges facing the region and to learn from one another how to most effectively advance free-market reforms.

The ALF will take place at Renaissance Hotel Kuala Lumpur on Feb 19-20 and we will have the special dinner to celebrate Tunku's birthday as the final session at this international conference.

Tun Musa Hitam will be delivering the main speech.

I am proud that this year we are able to take the celebration of Tunku's life and vision to this international platform. It is about time that those from outside Malaysia who share the desire to see more liberty and justice in this world get to hear about Tunku and his ideals for the country.

The Tunku's championing of freedom is not restricted to our national borders. He had a vision for the region too, and that led him to push for the creation of the Association of Southeast Asia (Asa), which then evolved into Asean.

Writing in this newspaper on Aug 22 2007, the late Datuk Abdullah Ali, one of the pioneers of the Malaysian Foreign Service, said that the entire concept of Asa, as the forerunner of Asean, "was founded, then developed to maturity, almost solely as a result of an idea that originated in the mind of Tunku."

When Asa was mooted, this region was suffering from the communist insurgency. In Malaysia, the Tunku made it quite clear that his belief in liberty could not exist side by side with communism.

The world knew him as a consistent anti-communist leader, and this was recognised in the *New York Times*' obituary for him published on Dec 7, 1990.

Today, perhaps not enough people appreciate why Umno's second president was so strongly against communist authoritarianism. Malaysians of my generation did not get the chance to see what the communists did.

And those who visit Beijing or Shanghai today may very well come back thinking there's nothing wrong with the leftist ideology.

Last weekend I visited Phnom Penh. Less than two hours away by flight from Kuala

Lumpur, this is a city that felt the blunt force of an attempt to establish communist rule by the Khmer Rouge and their leader, Pol Pot.

I visited the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Under the Khmer Rouge it was called the S-21, and functioned as the main prison and torture centre. This was a place that was once replete with suffering and deaths.

S-21 was a high school until the arrival of the Khmer Rouge. The communists changed the classrooms into torture chambers. The pictures displayed there now are very graphic.

People were detained and tortured to extract confessions, and many ended up giving false confessions in the hope that the torture would stop.

Pol Pot was a paranoid Prime Minister. He believed that it was better to act against an innocent person by mistake than to spare an enemy by mistake.

He took action against anyone who showed signs of wanting to challenge him. At Tuol Sleng, Pol Pot instructed the killing of his own Deputy Prime Minister Von Veth and Kuy Thuon, chief of a northern state.

The suffering caused by Pol Pot and his communist comrades was even more apparent at another memorial site, the Choeung Ek Killing Field. It took about half an hour to get there from Phnom Penh. I will never forget what I saw.

The Cambodian government has built a stupa to commemorate the site, filled with more than 5,000 human skulls found within the compound. It is estimated that close to 20,000 people were bludgeoned to death there because bullets were expensive.

The bodies were piled in rows of mass graves. There was even a tree where communist soldiers smashed the heads of babies, before throwing their bodies into a hole.

All this was done because the communist Khmer Rouge did not believe in dissent. To them, human lives were expendable.

They used to say that "to remove you is no loss, to keep you is no gain." Such was the belief that led to massive suffering under an authoritarian regime.

When the Tunku was Prime Minister, the communists were not yet ruling Cambodia. But he knew the dangers authoritarianism can bring to us and he pre-empted it by engraving the values of freedom, liberty and justice in our Proclamation of Independence.

As we celebrate the Tunku's birthday this month, let us remember him as the freedom champion that he was.

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