

Historian's mark on Rukunegara

The Star - 6/7/2020 pg. 3

As 50th anniversary approaches, Khoo's legacy remembered

KUALA LUMPUR: Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Dr Khoo Kay Kim has been gone for a year but his deeds live on.

Like a tiger that dies leaving its stripes, he died leaving his name.

Khoo, who died on May 28 last year, was a historian whose contributions were a source of reference to many, especially in matters concerning Malaysian history.

And with the July 9 celebration of Rukunegara's 50th anniversary in conjunction with the Merdeka Month and National Day, his name comes to mind as Khoo was one of those who had drafted the principles of Rukunegara before they were declared on Aug 31, 1970.

Khoo was also known as a nationalist and a patriot.

"My father was always proud to introduce himself as a Malaysian," his son Eddin said.

"As the eldest of three siblings, I was close to my father. When I was five or six, I used to follow him to schools and other places across the country where he engaged in information programmes.

"Indirectly, he introduced me to Rukunegara and told me the history of the places we went to, which at the same time built my interest in the Malay language as my father had a very good command of it," said Eddin, who is a writer, cultural activist and patron of Pusaka, a cultural organisation.

Eddin, 51, said he and his siblings were raised to be polite and respectful of others, besides being open-minded to embrace ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity.

"No racial pride and prejudice allowed in our house.

"My father was a Peranakan Chinese from Kampar, Perak. My mother (Puan Sri Rathi Khoo) is Tamil and (when I was small) I was cared for by a Malay aunt who lived with us.

"It was indeed an extraordinary experience to have three major races in Malaysia living in the same house, practising their culture and religion in peace. It was that peaceful environment that made me hesitate to leave the house because I knew things were different outside," he said.

Rukunegara was introduced as a result of the meeting of Majlis Gerakan Negara which was set up

following the May 13, 1969 incident.

It was formed with the main purpose of forming a strong unity for the country's success and stability.

Sharing his experience of interviewing his father in a programme which focused on Rukunegara, Eddin said what impressed him the most was his father's open-mindedness in hearing the opinions of others.

"The discussions were rather heated as they were talking about the first principle of Rukunegara, which is Belief in God.

"What was concluded was that most people have their own religious faith and they believe in God.

"But my father did not dismiss

those who didn't, such as the atheists. This (open-mindedness) is the trait that was needed to enable such a topic to be discussed in greater depth," he said.

Eddin said through his observation after being involved in cultural programmes at the grassroots level for almost 30 years, Rukunegara had indeed been well accepted by every Malaysian.

"However, there is still a lack of observation and appreciation for the Rukunegara on the people's part," he said.

As such, he expressed hope that more efforts would be taken to nurture the spirit of and respect for the Rukunegara, especially among the younger generation. — Bernama