

When heroes are born

The story of the late deputy prime minister, Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, is one that begs to be shared, writes Tan Bok Hooi



1955: The new government federation photographed on the lawn of King's House (now Carcosa Seri Negara) in Kuala Lumpur after the swearing-in of the Alliance ministers. (Seated, from left): Financial Secretary C.T. Thomas; H.S. Lee; Tunluc Abdul Rahman; High Commissioner Sir Donald Mac Gillivray; Chief Secretary D.C. Watherston; Attorney-General M.P.J. Hogan and Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman. PIX FROM KLIK (WWW.KLIK.COM.MY)

N EWS of the mighty sun on the verge of tumbling over the horizon propelled my mother to spring to her feet and make a swift

dash to the grilled door. She'd earlier completed her task of transferring the freshly baked biscuits into the available plastic bags.

Still to find my place within her belly, I could imagine the troubling thoughts enveloping her mind. Grappling with a fear of the unknown, she'd grabbed her trusted bicycle and paddled furiously without looking back.

Navigating the snaky and narrow alley, accompanied by her faithful companion, it was a punishing race to safety. Meanwhile, my alarmed yet fearless dad was on the highest alert against any possible unwanted intrusion on the fateful day of infamy.

By the time nightfall gobbled up the majestic sun and its penetrating rays, darkness had taken centre stage and forever altered the landscape of tomorrow. Five-and-a-half decades ago seems just like yesterday for those who are scarred and wounded the deepest in the heart. Shortest in terms of memory and yet longest in terms of mental anguish, they carry the burden of yesterday as they

search for a brighter tomorrow.

WRITTEN IN THE STARS

Heroes are born in the moments of chaos. Disorder reigns supreme when uncertainty rules the day. However, order will find a way to prevail even in the treacherous sea of darkness. The sun



LEFT: Family photo of Datuk Haji Abdul Rahman Mohamed Yassin. picture COURTESY OF TAN SRI DATUK DR ABU BAKAR SULEIMAN



RIGHT: Family photo of Tun Dr Ismail. PICTURE COURTESY OF TAWFIK ISMAIL

will rise from slumber without fail. The rays of hope will continue to illuminate even the darkest corners.

The sheer power of light will find its way even through the most hidden cavities, unseen by the naked eye yet felt by the warmest heart. The will to suppress the unthinkable shall carry us through — without fear or favour.

Fundamentally, we're all made of quarks and leptons. These are the basic building blocks of matter that shape the universe which began in its earnest approximately 13.8 billion years ago.

Nothing will change that fact for the longest time unless the proton is conclusively found experimentally to decay. Earth came into existence 4.5 billion

years ago. Dinosaurs roamed the fertile Earth during the vibrant Mesozoic era 245 million years ago. *Homo sapiens* walked freely unhindered 300,000 years ago.

The evolutionary path is clear for everyone to observe. Our similarity is obvious, yet our diversity is unquestionable. Will the strength of our similarity allow us to truly celebrate the inherent power of diversity?

When the clarion call pierces through the spaces between the dancing molecules rejoicing in the rain-soaked air, there's never a shadow of doubt as to what needs to be done. When the bugle sounds its alarm, the paramount interest of the masses takes precedence above everything else. When we're propelled by

the indomitable desire to make a distinctive difference... how can we then resist what's already written in the stars?

CHILDHOOD IDYLL

In my adolescence, which I cherish greatly, we found the greatest pleasure in congregating in our dusty neighbourhood dwelling and partaking in the simple game of spinning tops. Players were plucked from every nook and corner of the kampung, irrespective of their background.

Each person would proudly bring along their prized possession to be showcased in the ring. We would deftly toss the spinning tops into the gladiator's ring only to be bombarded by the crush-

ing blow of other spinning tops joining the fray. The loudest cheer of *gandang* game would reverberate endlessly... breaking the serenity of the environment.

Dogs barked incessantly at our childish behaviour. Neighbours chuckled at our infectious fighting spirit. The sun smiled broadly at our cohesiveness. The rain stayed away for our moment of glory.

We were one and nothing could separate us from the feeling of togetherness. By the time we adjourned for home, be it for a plate of nasi lemak, chee cheong fun or chapati, our hearts would be filled with an overflowing feeling of satisfaction — yearned by many and envied by a few.

That feeling still rankles to this very day. **TURN to page 20**

Cultivating mutual trust, friendships

FROM PAGE 19

WHEN A MASTER APPEARS

History books are treasure troves that allow us a glimpse into our past. But the past is hardest to grapple with when ambiguity looms largest. Museums seek to amplify our comprehension of the past and serve as a reminder of what the future might possibly hold.

Exhibitions – in the right context – are meant to educate us on what we might inadvertently forget and fail to cherish in the most appropriate manner.

So, when I dwelled deeper as curiosity took hostage, I found myself immersed in a story that I felt begged to be shared. Information serves to confuse us sometimes. Yet, the right one will only propel us to be wiser than yesterday. We embrace what's best for tomorrow.

His selfless return to the centre stage was unquestionably mesmerising. Putting the nation above everything else in its moment of need was immensely inspirational. Hailing from Parit Bakar, Muar, in the southernmost region of Johor, his early education took him to the grounds of Sekolah Melayu Bukit Zaharah together with his brother.

With the other seven siblings, they formed the close-knit family of Datuk Haji Abdul Rahman Mohamed Yassin, who served as the first president of

Dewan Negara on Sept 11, 1959, for nearly eight years.

He then continued his education at the English College Johor Baru, where *Pendeta* Za'ba was one of the notable teachers. With great emphasis on education by his father, he eventually graduated with a degree in medicine from the University of Melbourne in 1945.

He'd later establish his private clinic named Tawakkal from 1947 for a fruitful period of six years. During his years in Australia as an undergraduate, he shared with his father – through their correspondences – how his fellow friends treated him as an equal.

Our thoughts are nurtured in our youngest days. Our opinions are formed as we evolve with the progress of time. The impact is the greatest when our mind still searches for the master. It wasn't surprising that he cultivated a strong relationship with many across vast boundaries.

Wouldn't it be right to say that the ultimate barometer for a long-lasting friendship is a sense of mutual trust and respect regardless of age and everything else? How many of us can really boast of the kind of friendships cultivated so passionately from our adolescent days?

TUN DR ISMAIL ABDUL RAHMAN

Both he and his brother were very

close and helmed the Malay Graduates Association, a vibrant platform for discussions, including on the topic of independence. It signalled their entrance into an ecosystem that fostered a fruitful and meaningful interaction with Tunku Abdul Rahman, our first prime minister.

His father, of Buginese descent, was a magnanimous individual and was ever so gracious to lend a helping hand to the less fortunate. He adopted a few young Chinese girls, who were given away by their parents, and unselfishly brought them up as one of his own.

We're defined very much by our actions. They are a testimony of our fundamental principles of life. Words carry weight, yet actions are the true reflection of our inherent desire. Without taking the very first step, how then can we ever measure what we can really achieve?

His brother served as the minister of interior in 1959, before taking up the post of High Commissioner to Australia in 1961. Meanwhile, he served as the minister of external affairs in 1959 after returning from the United States in his capacity as Malaysia's first ambassador and the nation's representative to the United Nations. Subsequently, he helmed the internal security and then the home affairs department before exiting the political arena in 1967 due to health reasons.

When the nation was plunged into darkness in May 13, 1969, he returned in the most selfless manner to lend a helping hand. Drawing from his expansive experience in people and conflict management, he assisted in the best possible way for the country to return to the desired normality.

He served as the deputy president of the National Operations Council (*Majlis Gerakan Negara* or Mageran), and subsequently as the deputy prime minister from 1971 to 1973 to then-prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

He's none other than the late Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman. His brother is the late Datuk Suleiman Abdul Rahman.

IN THE WINTER OF TOMORROW

History is bitterly littered with a litany of conflicts from yesteryears. Navigating with subtlety across such blurred boundaries in order to reduce simmering unintentional tensions is excruciatingly difficult, yet is definitely not impossible.

Generating the desired harmonious relationship as preached by the founding fathers is never truly a mirage. Walking a tightrope against a backdrop of the naysayers of tomorrow is definitely demoralising. Yet faith in ourselves and trust in others are what we must unselfishly cultivate. For there'll always be light even in the darkest cor-

ners of life. And when there's light, a glimmer of hope will surely be born.

As we traverse the meandering passage of life, there'll undoubtedly be times where we'll find ourselves "marooned" in the thickest woods. There'll be solitary moments where we fall into an undesirable oblivion. But never shall we fail to lift ourselves to fight all over again as long as we remain steadfast in our belief of the cherished dreams of tomorrow.

There'll be times when we'll yearn for a trusted guiding hand. Not to carry us, but merely to illuminate the right path, which may have been camouflaged by the sands of time.

As we celebrate the month of independence, remember to cherish those who have given so much in the quest for a better tomorrow. We salute those who have contributed so immensely in nation-building as we forge ahead with unbridled confidence. May the echoes of Merdeka find us and keep us warm in our hearts – even in the coldest winter of tomorrow.

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Nov 18, 1955: The Alliance representatives to the constitutional talks in London before meeting with the representatives of the rulers in Kuala Lumpur. (From left) Labour minister Tun V.T. Sambanthan; prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-haj; natural resources minister Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman; transport minister Tun H.S. Lee and education minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.



TOP: Sept 12, 1970: Tunku Abdul Rahman (left) saying goodbye to Tan Sri Hussan Fatany, the Saudi Arabian ambassador and doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, at Subang Airport before leaving for Thailand for an official visit. Looking on is acting prime minister Tun Dr Ismail. VIPs, including cabinet ministers and representatives of foreign missions, were at the airport to see Tunku off.



Sept 1, 1965: The picture captures the mood of the dignitaries as they watched the band play with keen interest at Stadium Merdeka. (From right) The Yang di-Pertuan Agong and Raja Permaisuri Agong, prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, deputy prime minister Tun Abdul Razak and home minister Tun Dr Ismail.



LEFT: The writer believes in a better tomorrow.