

# Just tribute to an unsung hero

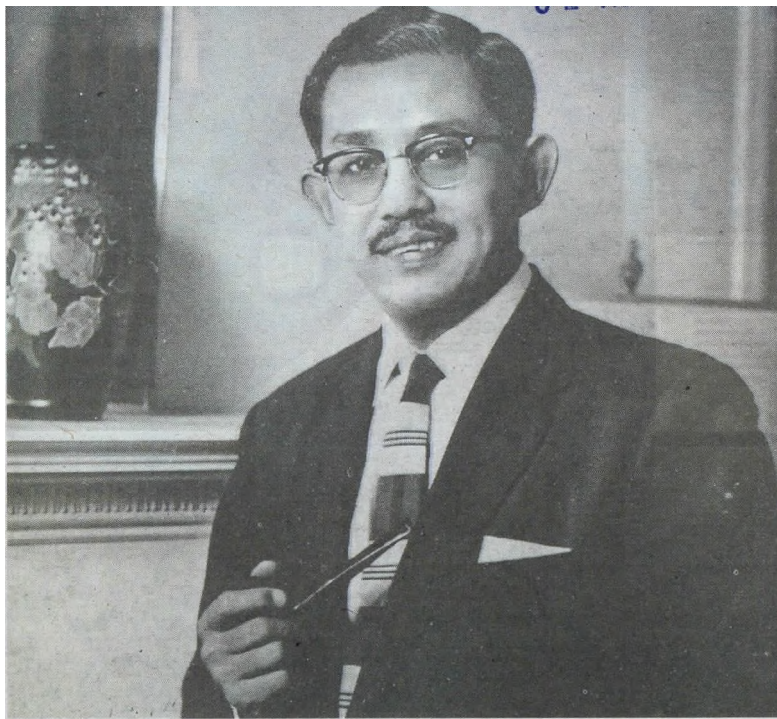
TODAY, our unity government will launch a programme to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the passing of Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman (*pic*), one of Malaysia's finest statesmen who was appointed deputy prime minister in 1970 and died in office three years later at the age of 57.

The programme is being held in conjunction with the National Month celebration and aims to educate the younger generation about Dr Ismail's significant contributions to the country's development.

He was one of the figures who conceived the five principles of the Rukun Negara after the race riots of May 13, 1969.

Older Malaysians would remember that he was the first to be awarded the honorific title Tun, and that he died in office as acting prime minister.

Should these facts have any bearing on our youths? I would think yes. Prior to the screening of *Oppenheimer*, the movie about American scientist, J. Robert Oppenheimer and his role in the development of the atomic bomb, many youths who watched it would not have thought of the destructive power of nuclear weapons. Well, Hollywood made sure that youths realised this through the film.



The programme will make our youths realise just how important Dr Ismail was in shaping our history and that his "*Jasa terus dikenang*", as the Malay saying goes.

The May 13 riots could have brought our nation to its knees if

handled wrongly. With a burgeoning Indonesia and an increasingly confident Singapore on our tail back then, plus the threat of communism, Dr Ismail had his hands full.

But he figured out the equation that would ensure Malaysia

would continue to be self-sustaining well beyond the deeds of short-lived politicians, some of whom were highly destructive.

He fought for unity at all cost, placing engagement with the different races as his number one priority, democracy as non-negotiable and maintaining good diplomatic relations.

As a Rhodes scholar in Oxford, I was accorded many academic privileges, but the one I valued most was being allowed access to primary historical records that show clearly how heroic Dr Ismail was.

He knew that the riots could escalate unless the key pillars and conditions for a healthy multiracial nation were robustly safeguarded. He died doing this, and I doubt he was properly thanked for it. For this and more, Malaysians of all races should salute this man and remember his sacrifices for the nation.

I hope this programme will go on to recognise other Malaysians irrespective of race for their dedication in preserving harmony and peace in our multiracial Malaysia.

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