

# Ex-DPM Ismail was 'colour-blind'

## Tawfik: My late dad said all contributed to independence

**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia's diversity was the bedrock of its move towards nationhood, says the son of one of the country's founding fathers.

As such, it was historically inaccurate to say that "Malaysia is a Malay country", said Tawfik Ismail, whose father was Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, the second deputy prime minister.

"It is well known that Malaya achieved independence through the united efforts of its diverse races, which led to the formation of the country," he said in remarks to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his father's death on Aug 2, 1973, at the age of 57.

Dr Ismail was among the key negotiators of Merdeka.

And in the aftermath of the May 13 riots, he and then premier Tun Abdul Razak Hussein charted a roadmap for a then-wounded nation.

Tawfik, who advocates for a multiracial country, said Malaysian political leaders should embrace the country's diversity.

"Malaysia needs to strive for more political leaders who are racially colour-blind," he said.

In an interview with *Sin Chew Daily*, Tawfik spoke about racial

harmony, national unity and the current political landscape of Malaysia.

He said he finds that many of today's political leaders seemed to be entrenched in the idea of putting race first.

"Regrettably, even many young politicians prioritise race over being Malaysian - except for Sabah and Sarawak, they appear to be more open-minded," he said.

Such a situation, he said, gave rise to issues when it comes to political campaigns, as politicians often resort to using race and religion.

"This is not a healthy sign for the nation," he said, adding that those in the peninsula have a lot to learn from their counterparts in Sabah and Sarawak about promoting unity.

Malaysia needs to focus on national integration and seek leaders with integrity to steer the country forward, he added.

"We should understand our history to appreciate what we have today.

"Currently, Malaysia is too centred on the peninsula, although Sabah and Sarawak are equally essential parts of Malaysia.



**Wise words:** Tawfik says his father, Dr Ismail (inset) always felt there was no difference between being Malay or Chinese.

"We need to observe how the people of Sabah and Sarawak can coexist harmoniously with different religions, including Muslims and non-Muslims living together under one roof.

"This is the type of nation we should strive to develop," he said.

He expressed hope that more idealistic young Malaysians, who aspire to serve the people and transcend racial divisions, can step up and lead Malaysia towards building a better nation together.

Tawfik was the MP for Sungai Benut in Johor under Umno from 1986 to 1990.

In the 15th General Election last year, he contested as an Independent in the Bagan Datuk parliamentary seat against Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and lost in the four-cornered fight.

Early this month when former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad remarked that it was against the Federal Constitution to promote Malaysia as a multira-

cial country, Tawfik was forthright in his reaction.

He told *The Star* that his father, who was deputy prime minister from 1970 to 1973, was brought up in a multicultural environment.

"My father always felt that there was no difference between being Malay or Chinese. It's the way you are brought up that makes you different.

"He was very open in absorbing ideas from other races and people," said Tawfik, 73.