

Tunku advocated for a united Malaysia

Lara: Above all, he wanted everyone to live in harmony

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PETALING JAYA: Amid the challenges gripping the nation, there is a call for Malaysians to reconnect with their historical roots through a renewed understanding of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

The founding father's granddaughter, Datin Seri Sharifah Menyalara Hussein, said Tunku's significance surpasses being merely a "symbol of independence" celebrated during the National month.

"His legacy goes beyond just leading our country's delegates to the UK to negotiate our independence.

"He had always been advocating for a united country where Malaysians, regardless of race and religion, would come together and live in harmony," she told *The Star*.

Lara, as she is more fondly known, quoted a part of a speech her grandfather had said in the 1960s: "I venture to prophecy: in not very many years from now, we shall hear far less about being Malay or Chinese or Indian, and far more about being Malaysian."

Tunku's unwavering commitment to forging a cohesive Malaysia stands as a testament to his belief in shared prosperity and communal understanding, she said.

Lara added that she tried to

follow in the footsteps of her grandfather by studying political science when she was in university.

"I did political science. He wanted me to study that. I lived in many countries as my father was in the diplomatic service and Tunku wanted me to come back to my roots.

"I remember he wrote me a letter, calling me to return home and serve the country because for him, the country is his main priority," she said.

Due to some circumstances, however, Lara put on hold her plan to be in the public service and ventured into the advertising industry instead, which she said, caused Tunku to be upset.

While she is now the founder and chief executive officer of the renowned advertising firm M&C Saatchi Malaysia, she never forgets to amplify the legacy left behind by her grandfather.

She worked with the societies through several organisations which include Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman, a foundation that provides financial assistance to students from the lower income groups.

Lara recalled a short video she watched recently, of which the creator went around the city centre and asked people on the streets whether they recognise photos of leaders and celebrities.

To her shock, most of the young generation were not familiar with



Family legacy: Lara (left) is keen to continue her grandfather's advocacy of unity. She's pictured here with her mother, the late Tunku Khadijah and (above) with the late Tunku Abdul Rahman.

the Father of Independence despite it being taught in schools.

"This drives me even more to communicate Tunku's legacies to the people. Through formal education is one avenue, but that would take time.

"I want to reach out to a wider audience by taking my own steps and exploring more ways to ensure that Tunku remains relevant in Malaysia.

"Maybe by producing films about him, too," Lara said, adding that it would provide more awareness on Tunku's personality, which she described as "compassionate and caring".

"I have a role to ensure his legacy lives on," said Lara, who is the child of Tunku's eldest daughter Datuk Paduka Tunku Khadijah Tunku Abdul Rahman, who passed away last year.