

Cultivating Tun Razak's legacy for the future

ON Jan 14, 2026, Malaysia will mark the 50th anniversary of my father's passing. For many, Tun Abdul Razak Hussien (*pic*) remains a figure etched in stone, a name on a building, a face on a monument or a chapter in a history book.

So, as we reach this half-century milestone, it is timely to reflect on how Tun Razak's legacy should best serve the nation.

For 50 years, the Tun Razak Foundation, of which I am honoured to be the new chair, has been a most effective custodian of the Razak legacy.

With this milestone, we have the opportunity to evolve and intend to shift from being primarily a custodian of his memory to a steward of his leadership values and methods.

The founding generation, Tun Razak and his contemporaries, built the architecture of our nation under immense pressure and without proven templates. They succeeded in lifting a fractured society facing multiple existential threats - communist insurgency, Konfrontasi and ethnic tensions - to become a viable nation to be nurtured and developed.

By the end of his life, we had Malaysia but not yet a Malaysian nation. And that project remains a work in progress.

After the young Malaysian nation broke down in the flames of May 13th, he ruled by decree for 22 months. He set up the National Consultative Council to help him diagnose why the riots happened and decide on the sys-

temic recalibrations needed, such as the New Economic Policy, Rukun Negara and the unity government.

He believed in market forces but also that the might of the state should be deployed to not only accelerate development but also do so in a more equitable way than unfettered laissez faire economics would.

Felda, Mara, Bank Pembangunan and PETRONAS were some of the government-Owned enterprises he deployed for this purpose. His "jihad" was poverty eradication and rural development; today's leaders must prioritise urban inequality and cost of living.

His leadership was also distinguished by his insistence on disciplined implementation. Policies were closely monitored through methodical oversight mechanisms, most notably the Red Book system, which tracked development priorities, delivery timelines and accountability at every level, from the kampung to the Prime Minister's office.

Equally central to his approach was the careful selection and empowerment of talent. He placed strong emphasis on identifying capable individuals, entrusting them with responsibility and giving them the authority to act while holding them to clear standards of performance and integrity.

Institutions mattered, but people mattered more. His legacy reminds us that nation-building depends not only on sound policies but also on leaders willing



to invest sustained attention in systems, teams and delivery. Integrity served as a clear boundary, ensuring that public power was never conflated with private interest.

There are many humorous narratives of how he was diligent to the extreme in separating personal and state finances, like how he moved his whole official entourage out from a luxury into a modest hotel in Switzerland after he studied the room rates and prices of food and beverage for himself.

This 50th anniversary provides us with a timely opportunity to recalibrate and re-examine our approach, asking how the Foundation can best evolve its programmes to serve the Malaysian public in a changing world.

As part of this work, the Foundation is strengthening our

youth leadership programme (TRF LEAP), which over the last 30 years has produced over 1,300 alumni members and leaders. We will also create additional avenues, for a wider audience to learn from Tun Razak's leadership and his successes, the limitations he encountered and his failures, too.

As we mark the 50th anniversary, the greatest tribute we can pay him is to use his legacy to cultivate leaders able to master the problems of the future with courage, humility, empathy, pragmatism and commitment to consultation and implementation.

TAN SRI NAZIR RAZAK
Chairman
Tun Razak Foundation

(Read the full letter at thestar.com.my)