

Heroic actions in land of giants

■ By Alina Simon

It could be regarded as a sleepy hollow, but Kedah, known as the rice bowl of the nation can also boast of being the "land of giants".

Although categorised as a "poor" State, Kedah is rich in men of immense courage and stature and has produced not one but two prime ministers and countless heroes.

Who can ever forget Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Alhaj, the prince who helped steer the country towards independence and eventually became its first Prime Minister.

Tunku Abdul Rahman's in-depth knowledge and skill in diplomacy and negotiation secured the country's orderly release from the British, and earned him the title "Bapa Kemerdekaan" (Father of Independence).

Kedah again produced another hero in Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad whose contributions are too numerous to list here although his greatest success probably was instilling pride in Malaysians. The Malaysia Boleh slogan coined during his premiership urged Malaysians to excel.

Dr Mahathir convinced us that we had the ability to achieve whatever we set out to do.

At the age of 79, both Dr Mahathir and his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Ali's agility and physical stamina are a constant source of wonder and amazement to us.

And what is their secret? The couple's answer is what doctors have been telling us all along. Moderation in food intake coupled with exercise, and no alcohol or tobacco.

But Kedah is not short of modern day heroes too.

Some are well-known, like the humble yet gritty Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain who refused to let detractors sway him from his determination to develop the "poor state" by 2010.

Syed Razak's Kedah Maju Action Plan 2010 may sound like a Herculean undertaking but his ultimate aim of making the State self-reliant instead of continuing to depend on Federal Government aid, is admirable. Other "heroes" achieved recognition for physical feats like 49-year old former soldier Nasir

Abas who chose to emulate the character in the movie *Forrest Gump* by running the length and breadth of this country.

The former staff sergeant could have opted for an easy life after his retirement from the military but he saw running as a way of challenging not only himself but fellow Malaysians.

Nasir's feat earned him several entries into the *Malaysia Book of Records* and his latest entry was the completion of a 2,173km run from Tawau to Kuching last year.

Yet another admirable Kedahan is Suhaimi Joleman who went on a solo motorcycle trip across the globe despite surviving a near-fatal heart attack earlier.

The 38-year old's quest for adventure coupled with a desire to spread the message of peace earned him a nomination in the recent New Straits Times Press-PricewaterhouseCoopers (NSTP-PwC) Young Humanitarian Award.

There are innumerable unsung Kedah heroes who have performed extraordinary deeds. We Malaysians salute all of you.

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HEART TO HEART: Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah singing *Hati ke Hati* at a function for a Perdana Cup badminton tournament.