The Man Who
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Manila hummed with excitement as delegates gathered for the third annual meeting of the Association of Southeast Asia. Phalanxes of motorcycle police escorted shiny official limousines to meetings at the pale, domed conference hall in the heart of the city. Inside the paneled auditorium and at diplomatic cocktail parties, an endless stream of dignitaries strolled up to greet the man who was the focus of everyone's attention. Malaya's stocky, smiling Prime Minister Abdul Rahman. 60. the golf-playing ex-playboy who this summer will bring into being a new Asian nation.

To one and all. Abdul Rahman happily took credit for the formation of the Malaysian Federation. As he puts it. "I am the father of Malaysia." Strictly speaking, this is not true; the idea has long been the dream of Asian nationalists enchanted by its economic and political prospects. For years. Britain too has advocated the plan as a neat way to tie up all its remaining Asian colonies (with the exception of Hong Kong) into one tidy independent package. But the Tunku (it means Prince) was the indispensable catalyst without whom Malaysia could not have been achieved. He wooed, bullied and cajoled the four other countries into the federation agreement, was the only logical choice to serve as the new nation's first Prime Minister.

Happy, Not Mighty. Unlike most other new Asian leaders, Abdul Rahman is no rabid nationalist. He has remained on close, friendly terms with the British, has no interest in pie-in-the-sky economic schemes. His political aims are simple: "Food instead of bullets, clothing instead of uniforms, houses instead of barracks.'' His new nation has a combat army of only seven battalions and an air force so small that the pilots often have trouble finding a fourth for bridge. "My ambition is not mighty Malaysia," says Abdul Rahman, "but happy Malaysia."

But many pressing problems threaten the Tunku's ambition. Malaysia's current prosperity is endangered by its dependence on a one-crop economy. Synthetics have already captured half the world's annual 5,000,000-ton rubber market and forced down the price of latex. On top of this, Brunei's oil reserves are fast depleting. To counter the economic threat, Malaya has embarked on an ambitious diversification program, is offering a five-year tax holiday to new industries and pushing a big land-development program for new cash crops.

Politically, Malaysia has already experienced some acute pains. Fearful that a stable new nation will curb Communist subversion in Southeast Asia, Russia has branded the federation "a cunning invention of London" set up with the "unqualified support of U.S. imperialists.'' Both neighboring Indonesia and the Philippines have launched a campaign of invective against the whole idea.

Walls of Prejudice. By far Malaysia's most complex and festering problem is the simmering racial hostility between the new nation's Chinese and Malay populations. Throughout the federation, the astute, prosperous, hard-bargaining Chinese dominate business, industry and trade, have economically far outstripped the rural, easygoing Malays. Chinese tycoons control North Borneo's booming young timber industry and Sarawak's vast, rolling pepper gardens; in Malaya. Abdul Rahman's government has complained that the rich, inbred Chinese business community has erected a "wall of prejudice" against ambitious young Malay businessmen.

The Malays have built some walls of their own. By Malayan law. only one-quarter of the government jobs can go to non-Malays, while Malays get special concessions in the granting of scholarships and licenses for new businesses. Rigid citizenship requirements have been set up for the Chinese (Malays are automatically citizens), and the Borneo territories plan immigration restrictions to keep Chinese businessmen out. "Special privileges are like a golf handicap." rationalizes Malaya's Chinese Finance Minister Tan Siew Sin. "They are not to hold the Chinese down, but to help the Malays along."

Golf Every Morning. It is ironically fitting that the complicated problems of federation are the province of a man who. on the face of it. is so uncomplicated himself. "I am a lazy man." admits Abdul Rahman cheerfully, and six years as Malaya's Prime Minister have not altered his funloving ways. The Tunku plays golf every morning (handicap: 24), checks the racing calendar before making advance political engagements, always takes a nap in the afternoon. An avid soccer fan and sports-car buff, he is chronically late for appointments, explains: "Being punctual always wears me out."

The Tunku has the charisma of the really successful politician. His title draws enormous respect from the masses, and at the same time his genuine charm and easygoing manner quickly win their confidence. Though he is a devout Moslem, Abdul Rahman enjoys brandy and soda; he is also an excellent curry cook. With his third wife, Sharifah Rodzia, and their four adopted children (two of whom are Chinese),* the Tunku leads a life of cheerful disorder in Kuala Lumpur's open, airy Prime Minister's residence, allows the 70 children of his servants the run of the house; visiting diplomats are often surprised during a conference to see a servant's child wander into the sitting room and climb up onto the Tunku's lap.

The Tunku has solved the problem of paper work simply: he does not read it. He has always had an aversion to the printed page, as a student picked up the knack of absorbing pertinent passages from books or papers that were read aloud to him. But though he has no intellectual pretensions, the Tunku commands unswerving loyalty from his brilliant subordinates for his almost charmed ability to avoid political mistakes. Says an aide: "He understands the Malay mind better than anyone else ever has." Abdul Rahman agrees. "I have the feel of the people." he says. "I have the touch."

The Playboy Prince. Abdul Rahman was the seventh son of his father's sixth wife and, with his 44 brothers and sisters, lived the plush life befitting the offspring of the Sultan of Kedah. His Siamese mother demanded that he be carried to school on the shoulders of a retainer, and though he was an indifferent student, his royal birth won him a scholarship to Cambridge, where he began to read law. But the Tunku skipped most of his lectures, seldom missed a tea or dinner-dance, distinguished himself mainly by picking up 28 traffic violations in his silver Riley with red fenders.

Not unexpectedly, the playboy prince flunked his bar exams. So far down the line of succession that he had no chance of ever attaining his father's sultanate, the Tunku returned to Malaya as a minor civil servant in a number of remote outposts. On foot and on elephant, he traveled through the bush getting to know the land and the people, once even worked as a manual laborer to help build a new mosque, which the grateful Malays named Rahmaniah after him.

World War II and Japan's swift conquest of the Malayan peninsula hastened Abdul Rahman's maturity. As a useful district officer, the Tunku was kept on the job by the Japanese. Secretly, however, he helped hide escapees from Japanese death camps, kept in contact with British guerrilla units, which were supplying arms to anti-Japanese Communist irregulars in the jungles.

"Who the Hell Is He?" Abdul Rahman was also in contact with the Malayan independence movement that began to take root when the Japanese ousted the British. With the end of the war, at the age of 42, the Tunku returned to England to get his law degree, began to play a larger part in the cause of merdeka (freedom). He insisted that it was the duty of every Malay in Britain to join the nationalistic Malay Society. Because of his age and long experience in the civil service, younger Malay students looked to him as their leader, called him—because of his darker skin—"Black Uncle." In fiery political bull sessions with youthful follower Tun Abdul Razak, the seeds of a future political partnership were being sown; today Razak is the most trusted member of his Cabinet.

Back home, the middle-aging lawyer joined the United Malay Nationalist Organization, slowly began building up a political following in his native Kedah. In other Malay states, the Tunku's firebrand followers from the London days began pushing him for the party leadership; finally, in 1951, Abdul Rahman took over as boss of the U.M.N.O. "Nobody had ever heard of him," an official recalls. "I remember people asking 'Who the hell is he?' "

They soon found out. Convinced that he could only achieve national leadership at the head of a multiracial united front, Abdul Rahman muted hotly anti-Chinese sentiment in his own Malay party, stumped the country urging Chinese and Indian leaders to unite behind him under the banner of a new organization called the Alliance Party. To finance his crusade, he sold his expensive cars and most of his other property. "I worked like mad, living andy sleeping on trains," says the Tunku. "I was often home only one day a month." But Abdul Rahman's zeal paid off. In the 1955 general election, the Alliance swept 51 of the 52 seats in the federal legislature, and the Tunku took over as Chief Minister under the British High Commissioner.

Merdeka. Abdul Rahman was so busy politicking that he had taken little military interest in the brutal, bloody guerrilla war that 350,000 British and Malayan troops and home guardsmen were waging against Communist insurgents in Malaya's tangled jungles. But after his 1955 election landslide, the Tunku grew afraid that the British might use the emergency to delay independence, arranged to meet the Communist rebel chieftains in northern Malaya to see if some sort of settlement could be worked out. "My ideas about Communism were determined by that meeting," says the Tunku. "I became convinced that once a Communist, always a Communist. They could never coexist with us in an inde pendent Malaya."

As the war in the jungle began taking a turn for the better, Abdul Rahman flintily told Britain that the time was long overdue for Malaya's independence. After months of haggling and delay, the Tunku finally forced Britain's Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd (now Lord Boyd) to the conference table. Throughout the grueling, three-week session in London, the Tunku refused to budge from his ultimatum that independence must come no later than Aug. 31, 1957. "When the Siamese have no intention of yielding, they just appear stupid," he told subordinates. "I'm half Siamese, you know." At last, Lennox-Boyd got the point and caved in. On the Tunku's target date, independent Malaya came into being.

"Good Old Tunku." The Tunku had no revolutionary blueprint for his new nation, brought into his Cabinet his old London crony, Abdul Razak, to hammer out a program for orderly progress. While Abdul Rahman ground down hard on Red subversives, Minister of Rural Development Razak (in the post he will retain in Malaysia's new government) started a program of new roads, schools and clinics to boost the standard of living in the primitive kampongs (villages) of the interior, where the Communists were trying to gain a foothold. In the air-conditioned "operations room" of his ministry, gadget-loving Razak carefully

watched the progress of his bulldozers on dozens of charts, movie screens and map displays, kept his program constantly ahead of schedule with his cold insistence on re sults—or else.

Abdul Rahman made no effort to squeeze the British out of the country, was convinced that Britain's continued economic and military presence was the best possible insurance for Malayan stability. Today a British officer commands the Malayan army, five senior British civil servants hold key positions in Malayan government ministries, and British businessmen control more than half of the rubber industry, repatriate $86 million in profits annually. "It's wonderful how this place has flowered since independence." says one businessman. "We're really much better off. Good old Tunku."

Parleys on the Green. With his young nation booming, Abdul Rahman looked with increasing fear at the predicament of neighboring Singapore, just three-quarters of a mile across the Johore Strait. There Communism was spreading like an infection among the underfed, underemployed masses in Singapore's squalid, teeming tenement quarters. By strikes, riots and boycotts, the Peking-oriented Communist-front Barisan Socialist Party tried to topple the tottering government glued together by Singapore's shifty, brilliant, Cambridge-educated Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, 39.

Never too choosy about where he got political support, "Harry" Lee first tried cooperation with the Communists, later adopted a "leftist, not extremist, nonCommunist, not antiCommunist" policy. It did not work; to save his political neck, he was forced to go for help to an old golfing partner—Abdul Rahman.

Lee's vacation house bordered a fair way of Kuala Lumpur's rambling Selangor Golf Club, where the Tunku shot his daily round. From tee to green, Lee tried to convince Abdul Rahman that Singapore's rickety coalition could never survive another election, and that a Red Singapore could only spell trouble for Malaya. Gradually, the Tunku came to the frightening conclusion that Singapore might well become "a Chinese Cuba."

One solution to the "Singapore problem" was obvious: a merger, so that Malaya's powerful internal security police could move in and help Singapore authorities hold Red subversion in check.

But the Tunku shuddered at the prospect of upsetting his nation's Malay racial preponderance by the addition of Singapore's 1,300,000 Chinese. "In order to balance the population," he says, "I thought of the Borneo territories."

Wining & Dining. Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo, however, were less than enthusiastic about the federation scheme. Borneo leaders resented being invited to join merely as a political and racial accommodation, desired instead some sort of independence of their own. Then Britain began putting quiet pressure on the three territorial governments, tried to persuade them that union in Malaysia offered them far more economic and political power than they could ever achieve by themselves.

But it was Abdul Rahman who sold the scheme. The Tunku wined and dined a continuous stream of Borneo delegations in Kuala Lumpur, warmed up Borneo leaders cool to the federation with promises of favored political positions in the new nation. He shrewdly offered the Borneo territories 70 seats in the federal parliament, against only 15 for far more populous Singapore and 104 for Malaya. He promised tax concessions and a $12 million dollop of Malayan aid annually to the territories, agreed to keep federal hands off Brunei's oil reserves. It was the Tunku's fondest hope that the new nation come into being

on Aug. 31, 1963, the sixth anniversary of Malaya's independence.

Then last December came a blow that threatened to destroy the Tunku's timetable. It was the uprising in Brunei.

"Just Too Much." Discontent with the Sultan of Brunei's corrupt, inefficient and autocratic regime had long been festering in the tiny, Delaware-sized territory. Last year the Sultan's government spent only $50,000 on drugs and medicine for its people, while laying out $47,000 for electrical illumination on the Sultan's birth day; action on requests to the government usually took from six months to three years. The dominant but powerless People's Party was also dead-set against Malaysia; the party's erratic, goateed, onetime veterinarian leader, Sheik A. M. Azahari, 34, wanted instead to align Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo into a single independent state—with himself as its leader.

When it finally erupted, the revolt was poorly organized and badly led. Four battalions of Britain's tough little Gurkha troops landed on Brunei, inside of a week sent the shattered remnants of the 3,000-man rebel army scuttling back into hiding in Brunei's steaming jungles.

But the Brunei revolt at last gave the Philippines and Indonesia, for different reasons, an excuse to display their opposition to the scheme. Oblivious to Malaya's success against Red infiltration, the Philippines feared that leftists would ultimately take over the new nation, thus putting a Communist neighbor right on their doorstep. Dusting off an old claim to North Borneo, the Philippines maintained that in 1878 the Sultan of Sulu had only "leased," not sold, the territory to the British. London stiffly rejected the Filipino claim to the region.

Indonesia shouted that the turmoil showed the deep dissatisfaction with Malaysia in the Borneo territories, and that the federation was only a plot to extend Britain's colonial influence in Asia. Rabble-rousing President Sukarno knew that a British-backed, economically viable Malaysia would not only derail his ambition to extend his influence over the Borneo territories, but might also serve as an inducement to rebellion for the people of depressed Indonesian Borneo. Moreover, Abdul Rahman has ignored every "revolutionary principle" for which Sukarno stands, has in the process created a conservative, prosperous nation, while revolutionary, leftist Indonesia, with its 100 million people, has slid to the edge of economic ruin. Says a diplomat: "To have a little country like this extending its influence in Southeast Asia was just too much for Sukarno."

Sound Ground. In a drumfire of propaganda outbursts, Indonesia hailed the "Brunei freedom fighters," lashed out at "British mercenaries and puppets," granted political asylum to Brunei Leader Azahari, raved that Abdul Rahman was "round the bend." (Retorted the Tunku: "What can you expect from a pig but a grunt?") Djakarta mobs hanged the Tun ku in effigy, and Sukarno declared a "policy of confrontation" against Malaya. Indonesian jets buzzed Malayan ships in the South China Sea, and army leaders darkly threatened "incidents of physical conflict" along the border of Brunei and Indonesia.

Sukarno did not dare to invade; he plainly hoped to induce the United Nations to step in and placate him as it did with West New Guinea—thus sparing him the necessity of fighting for what he wants. However, the U.N. seems unwilling to play Sukarno's game; a U.N. observer team told him that Malaysia is "on sound legal ground."

Promise to "Brothers." Last week in Manila, the acrid dispute between Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia added an undertone of tension to the otherwise calm meeting of the Association of Southeast Asia. Not on the official agenda, the Malaysia question came up

repeatedly in long private discussions between Abdul Rahman and Philippines President Diosdado Macapagal. The Tunku was anxious for the whole matter to be settled quietly. In an attempt to be reasonable and friendly with his "Malay brothers," he agreed to look into the Filipino claim to North Borneo, lukewarmly endorsed a proposal for an Asian summit meeting between himself, Macapagal, and Indonesia's Sukarno. But the Tunku vetoed the suggestion that he postpone the creation of Malaysia until some settlement could be reached; the federation, he said, would come into being by Aug. 31 as planned.

From the standpoint of language, religion, culture or geography, Malaysia is not a natural nation. But Abdul Rahman has faced problems similar to Malaysia's in his own Malaya—and there a decent society has flourished. He does not promise the moon to his new nation, only a sane, humane, workable government. Under his leadership, Malaysia can be, as John F. Kennedy has said, "the best hope of security in that vital part of the world."

*The Tunku's first wife, who died of malaria in 1935-was the mother of his two children, Daughter Kathijah, 29, wife of a Malayan studying in Britain, and Son Xerang, 27, now a major in the Malayan army. His second wife was a white Englishwoman, Violet Coulson, whom he married over the protests of his family; they were divorced in 1946.

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