

Unforgettable Jugah

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by **Simatherai Sannasy**

OUR Merdeka Day celebrations tomorrow will be another occasion to appreciate our country's success. We are blessed with peace and the people are contented. Hence, there is no reason why we shouldn't celebrate our 49th year of independence amidst pomp and pageantry.

Our success lies in our faith in ourselves - working as one people towards peace, progress and prosperity. Every Malaysian, irrespective of race and religion has done his part in developing Malaysia from an essentially agriculture-based economy resting on the twin pillars of tin and rubber. Malaysia has since independence made a quantum leap onto the path of industrialisation especially after the mid-80s. Now we are moving gradually into the high-tech era in line with the changing times.

On this auspicious occasion, as we join hands to celebrate our 49th Merdeka anniversary reminiscing the resounding cries of Merdeka! Merdeka! by our beloved Father of Independence Tunku Abdul Rahman let us not forget one man who played an important role in forming Malaysia. Whenever we celebrate the occasion and recall the words of Tunku, this man from Sarawak, the former Sarawak Affairs Minister Tan Sri Temenggong Jugah Anak Barieng, should not be forgotten.

When I met Jugah at his office in Kuching one cool November morning in 1976, he told me about Sarawak politics in his simple Malay. I was then a correspondent with the *Straits Echo* (now defunct).

"I have a close relationship with the Tunku," he said, adding that as Malaysia's first Prime Minister after getting independence from Britain, the Tunku made Malaysia a great nation.

"Had it not been for Tunku, Malaysia would not have existed in the first place and Sarawak would not have prospered to this extent," Jugah said in his husky voice.

Jugah was born in 1903 in Sungai Kapit, Sarawak and at the age of 20 he was appointed a penghulu (village headman) of the Merirai area in the Kapit District.

He recalled that in November 1924 he took part in the peace-making ceremony at Kapit between two warring tribes, the Ibans of Batang Rajang and Kenyahs at Long Nawang under the chairmanship of the Third White Rajah, Sir Charles Vyner Brook.



The writer with Jugah in his office in 1976.

To cut a long story short, Jugah who was instrumental in the Sarawak government's efforts to codify all the Dayak *adat* (customs) into a book called "Tusan Tunggu Bagi Ke-Tiga" said that when Tunku suggested that he wanted to include Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei and Singapore as part of Malaysia, there were widespread protests not only among Sarawakians but also from Filipinos and Indonesians who opposed the formation of the new nation.

"Tunku's idea of forming Malaysia was genuine and far-sighted," Jugah said, adding that the Tunku had several discussions with him on this subject.

Said Jugah: "When the subject of forming Malaysia was brought up in Sarawak politics, the Ibans who formed the bulk of the population expressed disappointment and aggressively opposed the idea."

"When talk of Malaysia's formation hit the headlines in the local newspapers in Sarawak, tension was high everywhere," Jugah said. He feared that civil war might break out among the residents any time.

"To make things worse," Jugah added, "President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and President Sukarno of Indonesia were declaring war on Malaysia. Sukarno wanted to crush Malaysia and waged guerilla warfare against the federation from 1963-65. He even sent war planes to invade Kuala Lumpur but their attempts were foiled."

"This was a trying period for me," Jugah said. He visited all the villages and traveled widely in the deep interior, even to the isolated parts of Sarawak, explaining to the people Tunku's intention and the need to forge unity and bring development to the region.

"I worked day and night to accomplish this and finally the people gave me an open mandate to decide," he said in a steely voice, his tone reflecting the heavy responsibility he had to bear. "The future of Sarawak, whether to join Malaysia or not, rested in my hands."

"My decision was final," he said. The Tunku was in touch with him always during that time. "How could I disappoint him? My people had responded to my call and they gave me the full mandate to be part of Malaysia."

Jugah recalled that when everything was settled he was asked to be one of Sarawak's representatives to sign the Malaysia Agreement in London.

His narrative over, Jugah fell into a long pause. Then he breathed a heavy sigh of relief, as if lightened of a burden he had been shouldering.

Jugah said he was elected as a member of Parliament in 1963. In the same year, he said, he was appointed Federal Minister for Sarawak Affairs and reappointed to that post after being returned in the 1970 general election.

Illiterate, never having held a pencil nor read a book, Jugah was one of the rare breed that held high positions in Malaysian politics. He

was well respected and praised for his good works and noble deeds by every section of Malaysian society.

When Jugah died at 81, Sarawak's Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud described Jugah as a self-made man who rose to be one of the nation's leading statesmen.

"His advice was always sought and held in high esteem in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere," Abdul Taib said. He added that Jugah was an outstanding leader who contributed to the formation of Malaysia.

Tunku Abdul Rahman in his condolence message said: "Jugah could not read or write English or Malay or even the Iban language. I used to call him my 'Beatle boy' because of his special Iban hair-do. His special hair-do was one thing that he had to retain because it was an ancient custom. So when he went to London with me people used to steal a glance at the Beatle boy, but Jugah enjoyed it all."

Well, at this time of the year when Malaysians heap accolades on the leaders of the past and present when celebrating Merdeka Day and National Day, let us not forget this simple man whose eloquence impressed a lot of people.

He played a historic role in persuading the Ibans to accept the formation of Malaysia. The people of Sarawak will remember him as an outstanding leader who had sacrificed much for the development of the rural people who had until then been left without education, health facilities and social services.