

Prime Minister Razak of Malaysia and Premier Chou En-lai of China have a friendly conversation; between them is interpreter

RAZAK'S CHINA TRIUMPH

Malaysian Leader Reshapes Region's Political Landscape

By THE EDITOR

TUN Abdul Razak bin Datuk Hussein, who has been Prime Minister of Malaysia since September 1970, is a deceptively quiet man. Behind the horn-rimmed glasses and conservative business suits that are his trademark is a man who is not afraid to break with the past, to take bold innovative steps in his country's quest for modernization, and to launch diplomatic initiatives appropriate for the 1970s.

After four years as Prime Minister, Tun Razak has capped his diplomatic achievements with a dramatic breakthrough: the establishment of official relations with the People's Republic of China, ending an era of mutual suspicion, antagonism and fear. Establishment of relations was formally proclaimed during a six-day visit to

China in May and June, the highlight of which was a 90-minute meeting with Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

Long in the shadow of Tunku Abdul Rahman, who retired after the race riots of 1969, Tun Razak became the young country's second Prime Minister at the age of 48. Tun Razak and the Tunku had been comrades in arms in the long fight for independence from Britain, and it was entirely appropriate that Tunku Abdul Rahman should pick his associate as Deputy Prime Minister when independence came on August 31, 1957. In that post Tun Razak, a shy retiring man who shuns publicity, devoted his energies to Malaysia's drive for industrialization, for equalization of wealth, and for harmony among its races. Since he became Prime

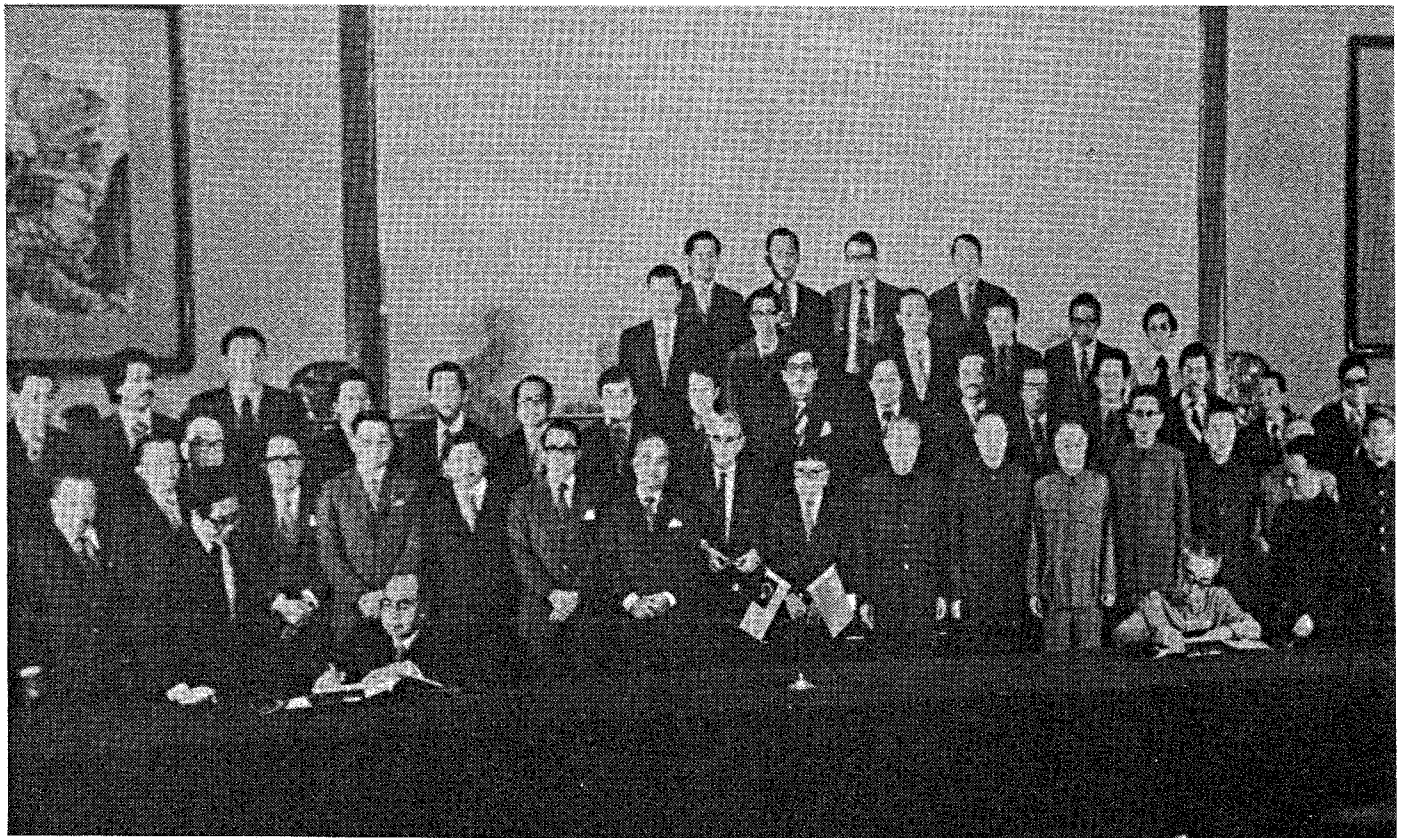
Minister, Tun Razak has also made Malaysia the diplomatic pacesetter in the Association of South East Asian Nations, or ASEAN, a seven-year-old cultural and economic grouping that includes Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Tun Razak's boldness in breaking with the past was vividly illustrated in his overtures to China, which took place over several years, and which culminated with the historic meeting with Chairman Mao on May 29.

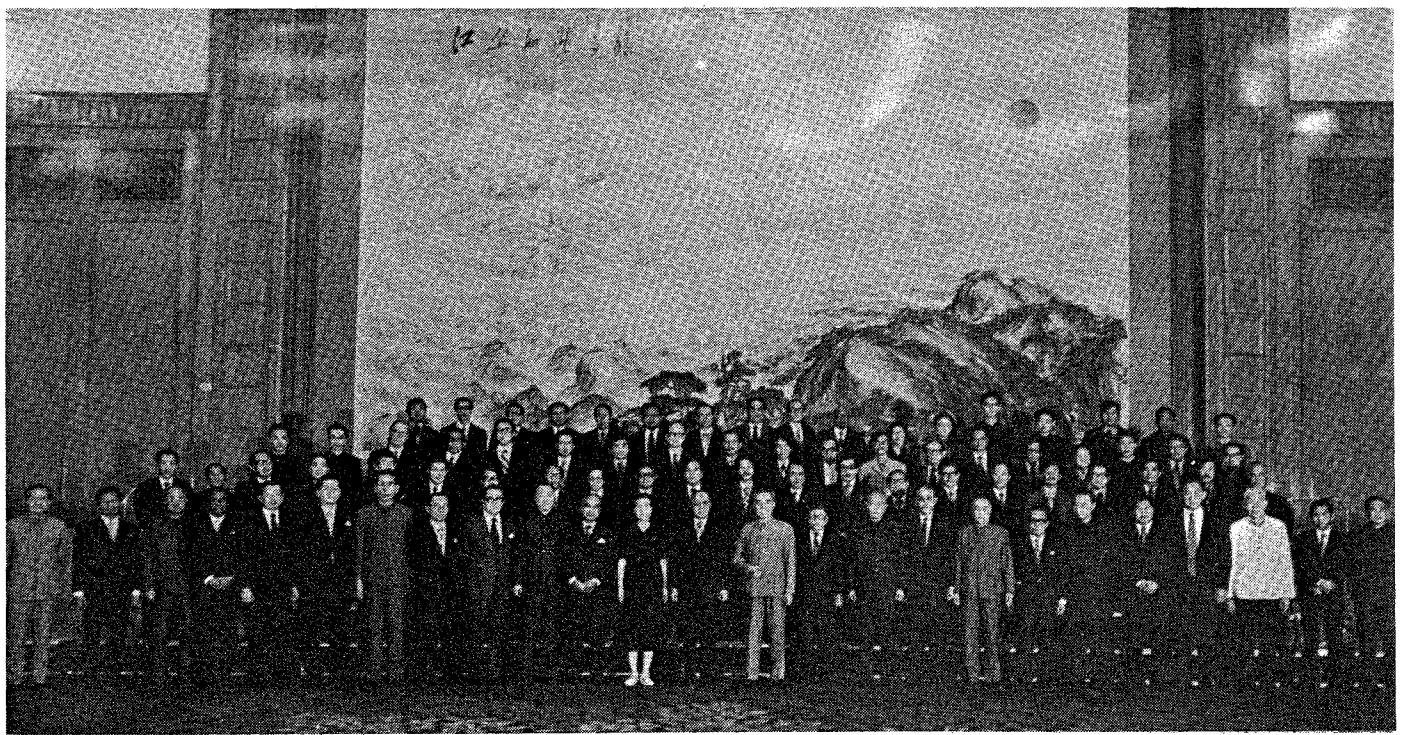
Tunku Abdul Rahman, for example, had steadfastly opposed establishment of diplomatic relations with China and, indeed, any "contact" whatsoever between the two countries. At the same time, Malaysia and Taiwan had consulates in



The Prime Minister waving to some of the several thousand Peking residents who went to the airport to welcome him to China



Prime Minister Razak and Premier Chou signing joint communiqué establishing diplomatic relations between their two countries



Tun Razak is flanked by Chairman Mao's wife, Chiang Ching, and Premier Chou; Vice Premier Li is second man on Chou's right



Tun Razak is seen off at Capital Airport by Chinese leaders, including Vice Premier Li, as he leaves Peking for Shanghai

each other's capitals, though diplomatic relations as such did not exist.

Asked why he would not permit a Chinese embassy in Kuala Lumpur, the Prime Minister replied in 1968: "China has thousands of her agents in this country whose sole aim and object is to try to overthrow the democratic government of this country by force of arms; for that reason we cannot have diplomatic or consular relations with her as this would be a help to these subversive elements, who owe loyalty to China."

This cold war rhetoric was characteristic of Malaysia's attitude at that time, an attitude shaped by its adhering closely to the American line in foreign policy. It also reflected fear that overseas Chinese resident in Malaysia were potentially "subversive elements who owe loyalty to China." About four million ethnic Chinese live in Malaysia, accounting for roughly 37 per cent of the 11 million population. Fear of the overseas Chinese as a potential "Trojan horse" is shared by other governments in Southeast Asia. The overseas Chinese account for four million of the 35 million Thais, three to four million of Indonesia's 120 million, and about 670,000 of nearly 40 million in the Philippines. In Singapore, they are in the majority, comprising 75 per cent of the 2.3 million Singaporeans.

Furthermore, the presence in Malaysia of Communist guerrillas in border areas

was seen as another obstacle to relations with China. Government officials believed that the guerrillas, who for the most part were ethnic Chinese, were receiving moral and possibly material support from China. As recently as last September, Hashim Sultan, deputy secretary general for foreign affairs, asserted that China was at least indirectly linked with the guerrilla activities.

SHORTLY after Tun Razak became Prime Minister, the thaw began to set in. In January 1971, the Chinese Red Cross sent US\$200,000 worth of emergency aid to the Malaysian Red Cross to help Malaysian flood victims. Significantly, Tun Razak is the president of the Malaysian Red Cross.

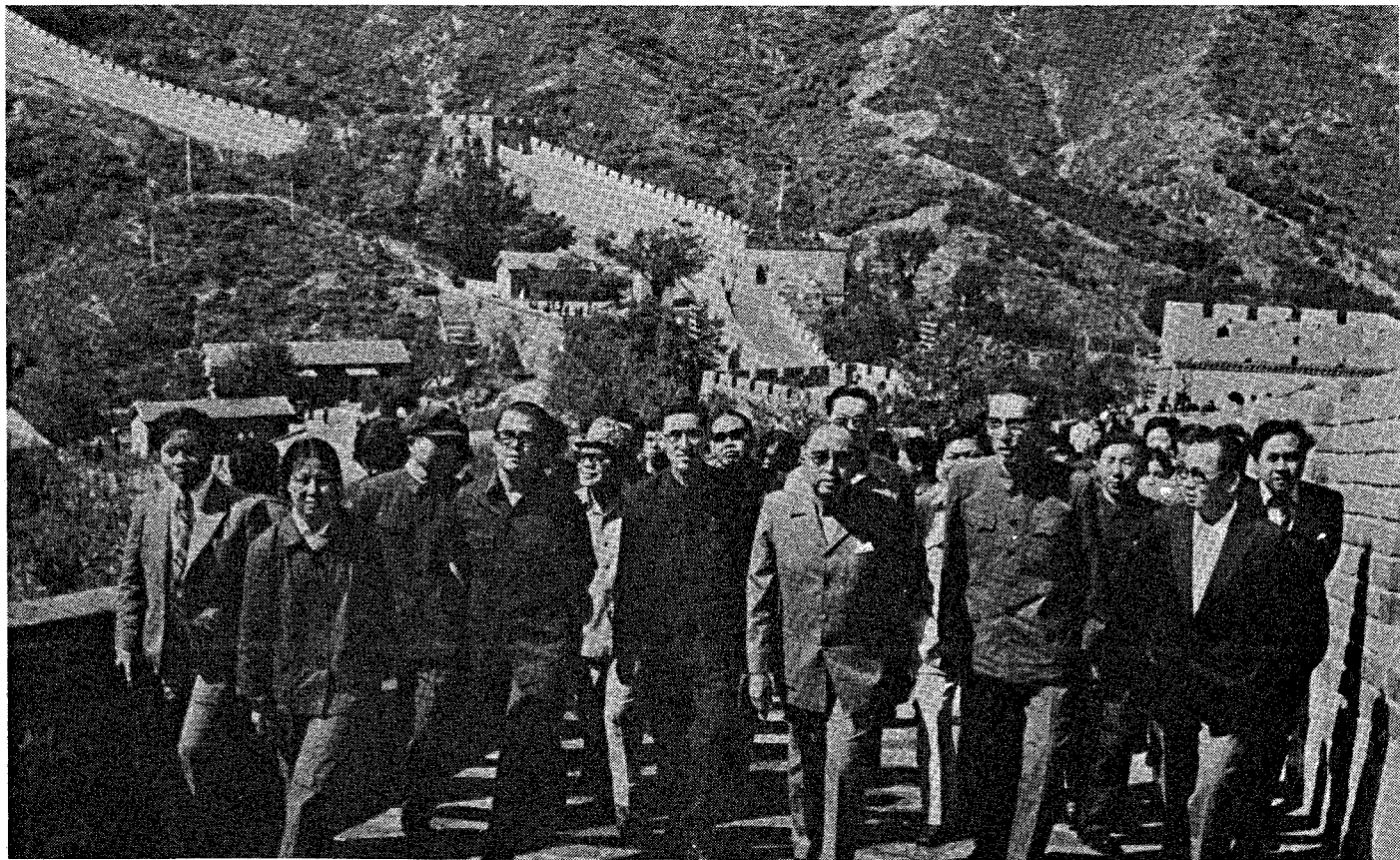
Later that year, the Prime Minister quietly set the diplomatic wheels in motion, sending the first trade mission to China since Malaysia's independence. Two months later came the announcement of the secret visit to Peking by Henry A. Kissinger, followed by President Nixon's historic visit six months later. The presidential visit, and the subsequent United States-China *rapprochement*, broke the diplomatic logjam and added impetus to Malaysia's quest for normalization of relations with China. In the fall of 1971, Malaysia gave up its "one China, one Taiwan" policy, voting for the Albanian resolution in the United

Nations, which called for the expulsion of the Chinese Nationalists and the seating, in their place, of a delegation from the People's Republic of China.

The new currents unleashed by the Nixon visit and the Chinese presence in the United Nations cut loose old underpinnings of political dogma. When the President of the world's leading capitalist country was seen shaking hands with Chairman Mao, the symbol of world revolution, old preconceptions had to be discarded. For many countries under American influence, friendship with China became a respectable objective. In rapid succession, countries in Western Europe, Africa and Latin America hastened to accord diplomatic recognition to China.

The thaw in Washington-Peking relations caused Asian countries, particularly Japan, to seek their own accommodations with China. But Tun Razak surprised many observers by his bold initiatives because Malaysia, at least on the surface, seemed to face a big obstacle to amicable relations with China: it had a larger ethnic Chinese population than any other Southeast Asian country.

But the imaginative Tun Razak, instead of fearing the presence of a Chinese embassy in Kuala Lumpur, believed that it could be to his advantage. Recognition by Peking, it was reasoned, would cut the ground from under the Maoist guerrillas



Tun Razak, between negotiating sessions, takes time to go sightseeing at the Great Wall, accompanied by Chinese officials

who have been presenting a problem to his government; it might also help his party by attracting Chinese votes during the country's general election.

Moreover — and this is perhaps more important — the Prime Minister, saddened by seeing Southeast Asia ravaged and torn by war, envisions the region as a "zone of peace and neutrality," guaranteed by all the great powers. While ties existed with the United States and the Soviet Union, Malaysia lacked diplomatic relations with China, the most important country in Asia, and one whose support was essential if Tun Razak's grandiose scheme for a neutralized Southeast Asia were to materialize.

In brief, therefore, Prime Minister Razak's China visit had three main objectives:

(a) Recognition by China of Malaysia's independence and sovereignty, thus blunting the Communist guerrilla movement in the border areas,

(b) Resolution of the "overseas Chinese" question with China's assistance, and

(c) Support by China for Malaysia's proposal to make Southeast Asia a zone of peace and neutrality.

In preparing to recognize China, Malaysia in 1973 established diplomatic relations with North Korea, North Vietnam and East Germany.

Tun Razak's road to Peking had been carefully paved by an increasing volume of trade. China bought 125,327 tons of Malaysian rubber last year, 60 per cent more than in 1972, and more than double the 56,919 tons of 1971. China has replaced the Soviet Union as the chief customer for Malaysian rubber, and is the country's third largest direct importer, after the United States and the Soviet Union.

Progress on the trade front foreshadowed success on the diplomatic front. On May 21, after nearly two years of negotiations, it was announced that the two countries had agreed to establish diplomatic relations with each other and that Prime Minister Razak would visit Peking to formalize the agreement.

On May 27, the eve of his historic journey to Peking, Tun Razak declared somberly at a press conference: "I am going on a journey of goodwill and friendship to sow the seeds of mutual understanding between Malaysia and China." He said the agreement with China was the culmination of foreign policy changes initiated by Kuala Lumpur since 1970.

The next day the Prime Minister, accompanied by 44 party leaders, officials and journalists, took off on a special

Malaysian Airline System jetliner for China.

THE official welcome extended to Tun Razak was one reserved for very special visitors. From the time the Boeing 707 touched down in Peking until it lifted off again from Shanghai six days later, the Razak party was accorded signal honors that marked a turning point in Asian politics. Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien was at the airport, where a grand welcome ceremony was held. Prime Minister Razak, accompanied by Chinese officials, reviewed a guard of honor made up of men of the ground, naval and air forces of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and walked around to meet the welcoming crowds.

That night, the 76-year-old Premier Chou En-lai, in spite of his ill health, personally gave a banquet in honor of Prime Minister Razak. In his welcoming speech, Premier Chou lent support to Malaysia's proposal to neutralize Southeast Asia. He declared: "The Malaysian government's position for the establishment of a zone of peace and neutrality in Southeast Asia gives expression to the desire of the Southeast Asian peoples to shake off foreign interference and control and has won support from many Third World countries. The Chinese people sincerely wish the Malaysian people still greater victories on their road of advance.

"The realities of Southeast Asia show

that superpower aggression and expansion are the main source of danger to peace and security in this region. We are convinced that, so long as the Southeast Asian peoples strengthen their unity and persist in struggle, they will certainly be able to frustrate superpower schemes and safeguard their own independence and sovereignty."

Prime Minister Razak, in turn, acknowledged that relations between China and Malaysia had not been smooth in recent years. But, he said, "I am totally convinced, Mr. Premier, that differences in ideology, in our relative size, and in our approaches to some international issues, should not present obstacles to the development of fruitful relations and beneficial cooperation between our two countries on the basis of mutual respect, equality and peaceful coexistence. Malaysia extends our hand of friendship to all countries which respect us and wish to be friends with us, irrespective of their political ideology or social system. It is in that spirit, I know, that we meet today in Peking, to begin the long journey ahead, after the vicissitudes of the recent past, of establishing genuine and enduring ties."

Tun Razak went on:

"The countries of Southeast Asia know better than most the ravages of war for we have been its unceasing victims for the last three decades and more. And even today, the prospects of peace in Southeast Asia are by no means certain."



Malaysian leader is welcomed by Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien upon his arrival

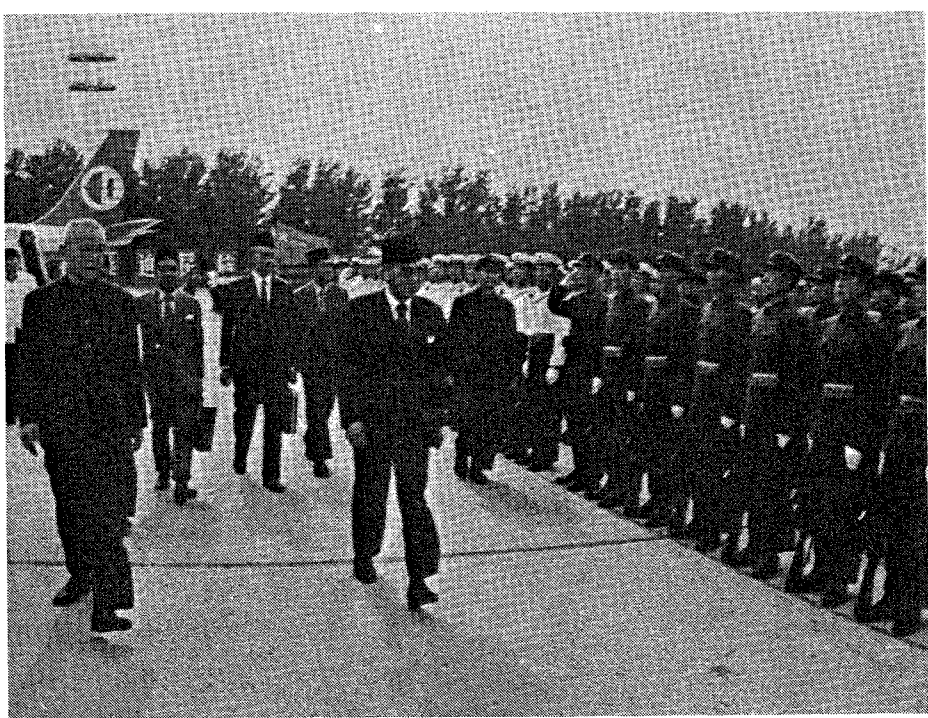
And, in an oblique plea for Chinese cooperation, Tun Razak said: "Historically, Mr. Premier, China has always contributed much to Southeast Asia. I am confident that today, in a spirit of mutual understanding and goodwill, China can play a constructive role in promoting the cause of peace and harmony in Southeast Asia."

After three days of talks and the 90-minute meeting with Chairman Mao, the Chinese and Malaysian sides signed a joint communiqué in Peking, formally establishing relations between the two countries. The communiqué also spelled out China's attitude toward overseas Chinese, a factor to be taken into account in the domestic and foreign policy of almost every Southeast Asian country. For this reason, it may be worth quoting the relevant passage in the communiqué:

"The government of the People's Republic of China takes note of the fact that Malaysia is a multiracial country with peoples of Malay, Chinese and other ethnic origins. Both the government of the People's Republic of China and the government of Malaysia declare that they do not recognize dual nationality. Proceeding from this principle, the Chinese government considers anyone of Chinese origin who has taken up of his own will or acquired Malaysian nationality as automatically forfeiting Chinese nationality. As for those residents who retain Chinese nationality of their own will, the Chinese government, acting in accordance with its consistent policy, will enjoin them to abide by the law of the government of Malaysia, respect the customs and habits of the people there and live in amity with them. And their proper rights and interests will be protected by the government of China and respected by the government of Malaysia."

China's point was driven home by Vice Premier Li at a banquet held shortly after the signing of the communiqué, when he declared: "Owing to historical reasons, there are considerable numbers of people of Chinese origin living in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries. The Chinese government's policy on this matter is consistent and clear. We encourage them to take up of their own will the nationality of the country of their residence. Anyone of Chinese origin who takes up of his own will or acquires the nationality of the country of his residence automatically forfeits Chinese nationality."

Thus, China was declaring, not only to Malaysia but to all Southeast Asian countries, that the government's policy was that ethnic Chinese had to make a choice — either to remain Chinese citizens or to



Tun Razak reviews guard of honor made up of Chinese army, navy and air force units

adopt the nationality of the country in which they lived — and China made clear that it preferred the latter option.

The day after signing the communiqué, the Razak party flew to Shanghai, where it stayed overnight. The next day, the Malaysians returned in triumph to their own country, after being given a tumultuous sendoff at Shanghai airport.

IMMEDIATELY upon his return to Malaysia, Tun Razak declared a public holiday to mark the success of his China visit. He had, to a large extent, been successful on all counts. Addressing a huge rally only a few hours after his return, the Prime Minister called on the Communist guerrillas to give up their struggle, pointing out that China had recognized Malaysia's independence and sovereignty. Furthermore, he warned overseas Chinese that "fence-sitters" would not be tolerated. Ethnic Chinese who had taken up Malaysian citizenship, he said, would be considered and treated as Malaysians, while those who chose to retain Chinese citizenship would be provided by China with suitable documents. Malaysia, for its part, would permit all "permanent residents" to continue to live in the country. Buoyed by China's endorsement of Malaysia's neutrality plan for Southeast Asia, Tun Razak said that, as a result of his visit, "the prestige of Malaysia has never been higher than it is today." Malaysia, he said, will reap benefits from its ties with China, both in terms of its foreign initiatives and its domestic policies.

The consequences of the China-Malay-

sia accord — the first agreement with China by a Southeast Asian country since the Nixon visit — are likely to be extensive. Malaysia has become a trailblazer for the other ASEAN countries, which consequently will have to reassess their own positions. Already, President Ferdinand E. Marcos has announced the intention of the Philippines to follow in Malaysia's footsteps.

The widely-circulated Straits Times of Singapore, in an editorial comment that reflected a widely-held opinion, declared of the Razak visit:

"It is the beginning of an inevitable process in non-Communist Southeast Asia — coming to terms with China's role as a conventional big power instead of the disruptive ideological force it was held to be until fairly recently . . . [Malaysia's] burgeoning relationship with China is in keeping with a worldwide trend towards normalization of relations with Asia's most powerful nation."

The road toward normalization of relations with China may be a long one for Southeast Asia. The cold war mentality of the fifties and early sixties produced fears and suspicions that will not easily be dissipated.

But, as Prime Minister Razak said in Peking, "the barriers of mind and spirit, awesome as they may appear, have to be crossed." And the other countries of Southeast Asia may well benefit if they ponder Tun Razak's statesmanlike plea for improved relations with China:

"Let us begin now to lay, stone by careful stone, the foundations of enduring and fruitful friendship." ■