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DIPLOMATIC PROFILE SERIES

Profiles of Malaysia's Foreign Ministers

TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN PUTRA AL-HAJ

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DIPLOMATIC PROFILE SERIES

Foreword by the Secretary General
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia

This Diplomatic Profile Series is intended to provide brief and readable overviews of former Foreign Ministers of Malaysia starting with the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al Haj

Tunku Abdul Rahman was not only our first Prime Minister but also concurrently Minister of External Affairs and unknown to many the main architect of our nascent foreign policy from 1957 onwards. Although he had an avid interest in international affairs and felt strongly about his pet likes such as greater regional cooperation in Southeast Asia for the common good of its people in economic and social terms it must never be forgotten that he was well served by a relatively small but effective team at the Ministry. From the Permanent Secretary as the post was known then of the Ministry and his young and enthusiastic staff to the notable Malaysians who were appointed as the nations first Heads of Missions one could not have wished for a more dedicated and highly capable group of individuals to further our national interests.

On the personal level the Tunku made the ideal Foreign Minister when it came to cultivating the friendship of foreign dignitaries which he did with great aplomb at his private parties as well as on the golf course.

However, he was also a shrewd observer of the politics of high diplomacy and knew instinctively how to anticipate and pre-empt developments in regional and international affairs that would directly impinge on Malaysia's stand on important issues. This profile of his time as Malaysia's first Foreign Minister shows not only his many achievements on the regional and international stage but also touches on a hitherto somewhat neglected aspect of his career—the cut and thrust of parliamentary debates in the *Dewan Rakyat*. In this latter role, too, the Tunku demonstrated both a highly principled defence of Malaysian foreign policy initiatives as well as a more light-hearted response to Opposition parties which took things too seriously, in his mind.

I welcome the publication of this Diplomatic Profile Series which allows us, in one small way, to pay tribute to our former Foreign Ministers, for the roles played and sacrifices made, in the name of King and Country.

Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa



Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj

Foreign Minister of Malaysia

1957-1959 and 1960-1970

Tunku's Early Interest in International Relations

It is not generally known that our first Prime Minister also took on the portfolio of External Affairs (which was the original name of the Ministry). One inescapable conclusion from the survey of Malaysian diplomatic history over the past fifty-one years is that the Prime Minister of the day was inevitably the chief architect of the nation's foreign policy right from the days of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra himself. His successor, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, continued the practice of being directly responsible for Malaysia's external relations. During their time in office between 1957 and 1976 the Ministry enjoyed a very close and influential working relationship with the Prime Minister's Office, much to the envy of other branches of the administrative hierarchy. The Tunku's passion for world affairs most likely had its origins since his university days in England when he got to know many of his fellow undergraduates from other countries, mostly those from the Commonwealth. It is equally possible that his later dealings with the British colonial administration both here in the Federation as well as in Whitehall had imbued in him an almost instinctive feel for some of the cloak-and-dagger character of diplomatic life. Added to this was, of course, his determined opposition to communism which, during those worrisome days of the Cold War,