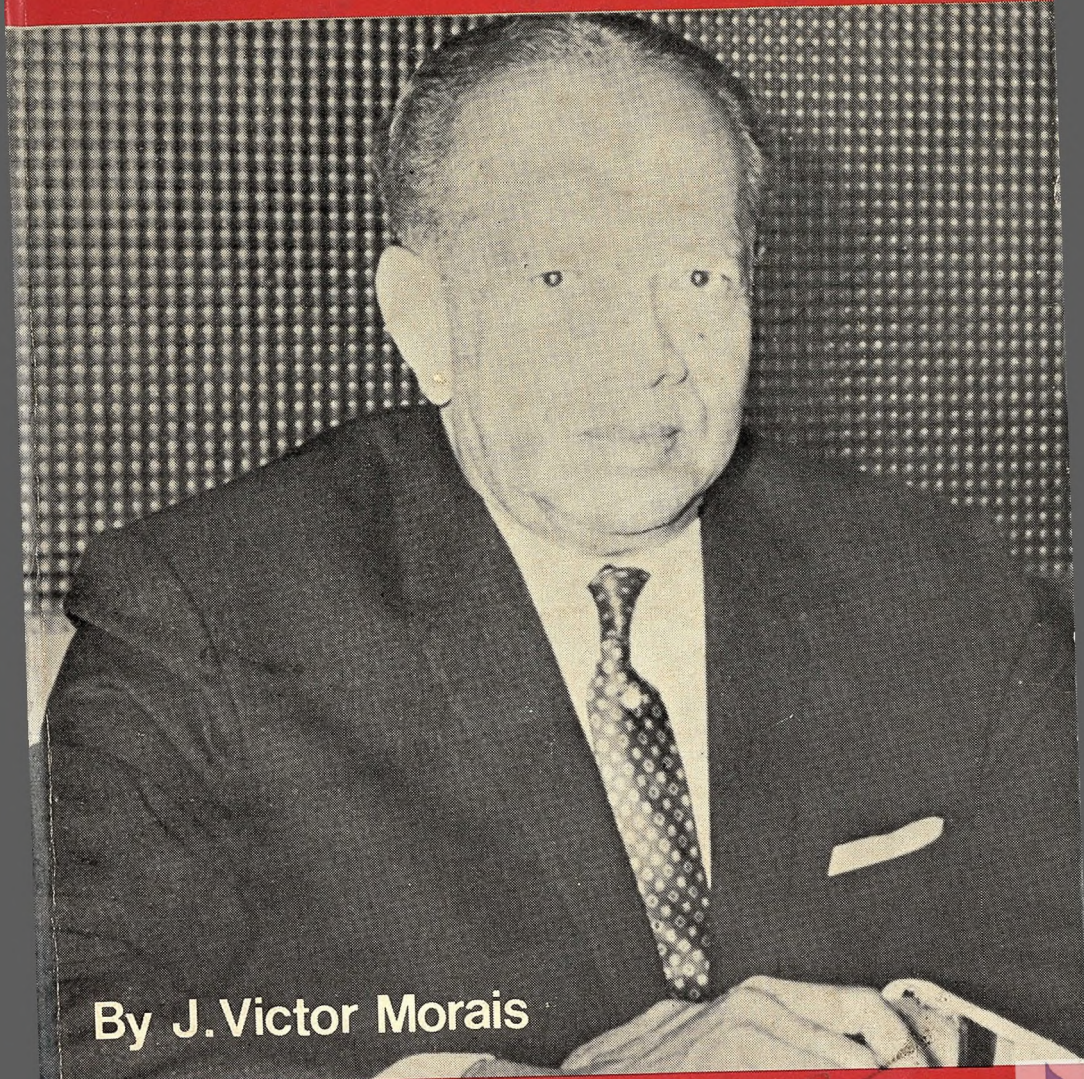


# WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

A Biography of  
Tan Sri Mohamed Noah



By J. Victor Morais

Foreword by Tun Justice Suffian  
Introduction by Tan Sri Omar Yoke Lin Ong



To: Dear Miss. Penny Chang.  
With Warmest Regards.

H. Abdullah

5-12-80



PERDANA  
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YAYASAN  
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# WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

*A Biography of Tan Sri Mohd. Noah*

By  
**J. VICTOR MORAIS**

*Foreword By*  
*Tun Justice Mohd. Suffian,*  
*Lord President of the Courts of Malaysia*

*Introduction By*  
*Tan Sri Datuk Haji Omar Yoke Lin Ong,*  
*President of Senate, Malaysia*



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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## Foreword

- BY TUN MOHAMED  
SUFFIAN BIN HASHIM  
S.S.M., P.S.M.,  
P.J.K.,  
M.A., (Cantab), Bar-at-Law.  
*Lord President of the  
Courts of Malaysia.*



This book is very welcome. It tells the life story of a truly remarkable man.

I first knew Tan Sri Haji Mohamed Noah bin Omar in 1948 when I was a humble magistrate in Malacca and he was already a D.O., in Segamat. Like many others in North Johore he used to come down to that ancient city quite often during the week-end to relax and to enjoy himself in the company of mutual friends including the late Mr Tan Soo Chong. In their gay company Malacca somehow became transformed, and momentarily ceased to be a sleepy hollow.

I got to know Tan Sri much better when I was transferred to Johore Bahru, where during the last few years of my pleasant sojourn in that delightful town we were neighbours in Bukit Jepun. I was by then D.P.P. and he President of the Religious Affairs Department, a very high and responsible post. Subsequently as Legal Adviser I worked closely with Tan Sri on drafting a new State enactment dealing with the administration of Muslim law in Johore.

I found in him a combination of Muslim learning and liberal views. This was and still is most unusual in a country where Malays steeped in Muslim traditions, like Tan Sri, are usually conservative, not receptive to new ideas, and opposed to all change.

I ceased to marvel at this unusual combination when I later remembered that he had pursued Muslim studies not in Mecca but in cosmopolitan Beirut, the meeting place not only of all the Arab countries, but also of East and West. Thus in his most impressive

years he was conditioned to viewing the world through not only tolerant and advanced Arab eyes but also through western eyes.

This trait of his has always stood him in good stead.

In the service he was not content to be like other government servants. He studied to improve himself, worked hard to serve the State and the people, and eventually took his pension after a distinguished service. But unlike others he did not retire. He took up a political career so that he could be of further service to the country, finally occupying the great office of Speaker of the House of Representatives where he controlled the proceedings with tact and good humour.

Malays marvel most at Tan Sri Noah's success in the world of business and commerce achieved after his retirement from the Johore Civil Service. He was successful because he could recognise a business opportunity, he knew how and when to seize it, and of course sometimes he took risks, but he had courage and a modicum of luck. Tan Sri Noah began to show his flair for business and to demonstrate that he could make a go of it, soon after he had become a pensioner in the early fifties. Those who know him well are aware that he has achieved success without depending on or expecting relatives in high places to give him a helping hand.

Malays who hope to win 30% of the business and commercial life of the country within 20 years, will find this account of Tan Sri Noah's life most interesting.

Non-Malays too will find Tan Sri's life an inspiration, showing how hard work, dedication, selflessness, determination, and above all, character, can bring a successful, satisfying and happy life.

**Lord President's Chambers,  
Kuala Lumpur  
1 Feb. 76.**

**Tun Mohamed Suffian.**

## Introduction

- BY TAN SRI DATUK HAJI  
OMAR YOKE LIN ONG,  
P.M.N., S.P.M.S., S.P.D.K.,  
*The President of the Senate,  
Malaysia.*



I heartily welcome this book on Tan Sri Mohamed Noah Bin Omar, an illustrious son of Malaysia.

The lives of some men are sometimes so well lived, that they assume a special significance for those around them and for others who will follow them. Malaysia has several such men. It has not been the custom hitherto, however, for the lives of these men to be made the subject of biographies so that other Malaysians may vicariously share in their experiences. Happily, the pattern is changing.

More and more biographies of prominent Malaysians are now being written. This biography of Tan Sri Noah by my good friend, Mr. J. Victor Morais, is a welcome addition to the limited literature on Malaysian personalities.

In a public and private life spanning the last part of one century and the major part of another century, Tan Sri Noah has learnt much, travelled widely, experienced a good deal and achieved great heights of success. Member of a leading Johore family of modest financial circumstances, he has shown a driving determination to succeed. He chartered a course through early life that took him to foreign lands in search of knowledge, at a time when higher education was the private preserve of only the privileged few. Armed with this "key" to life, he returned to this country to climb the ladder of achievement and success, first as a government official,

and later with independence and the new opportunities that it brought as a public figure.

It was a Speaker of Parliament and later as President of the Senate that Tan Sri Noah reached two of the highest pinnacles attainable to one in public life. His achievements did not stop there. Today when other men of similar achievements would be content to look back on a life fully lived, Tan Sri Noah, still with vigour and enthusiasm is facing the challenge posed by the hard demanding world of business.

I came to know this remarkable man when he was elected the Speaker of Parliament. He impressed me then with his natural charm and wit, his innate courtesy and sincerity, his judicious firmness and, above all his wisdom.

As the repository of vast experience and accordingly understanding the virtues and faults of his fellowmen, he set the tone for the dignity of a new nation's highest deliberative institution.

That the Malaysian Parliament has remained a place of dignity, credibility and respect in the eyes of all Malaysians, is in great measure due to the high standards of conduct set and demanded by Tan Sri Noah in the years that he presided over it.

I consider myself privileged to be presiding over the Dewan Negara in the footsteps of this distinguished Malaysian. The high tradition and dignity that he has helped establish and uphold, today guide me in my presidency.

In many ways this is a profile of one man's determination to live life to the fullest extent, giving a great deal of himself to the service of his country, his religion and his fellowmen. His outstanding public service should serve as a shining example for us all.

In all sincerity, I commend this biography to all Malaysians, for the lessons and the inspiration that we can derive.

## Author's Note

To know and understand the history of Malaysia or for that matter of Malaya as it was previously known, one must know about the Malaysians who have contributed to the writing of that history.

It is for this reason that I agreed to write the biography of Tan Sri Mohamed Noah bin Omar, the former Speaker of Parliament and later the President of the Senate of Malaysia, whose contribution as a civil servant, as a politician and later as the Speaker of Parliament have left their imprint on the history of Malaysia.

As many Malaysians are already aware Tan Sri Noah has acquitted himself extremely well in the difficult roles he played in the Malaysian Parliament. It is a fact that as the Speaker he was not a figure-head nor a “rubber stamp” to yield to the whims and fancies of any member of Parliament. He did his duty as he saw fit.

A man of many manifestations — a patriot, a politician, a philanthropist and above all, a devout Muslim, he lives his life to the fullest.

His achievements in various fields of human endeavour are described in detail by none other than Tun Justice Mohamed Suffian, the Lord President of the Federal Court in his Foreword and Tan Sri Omar Yoke Lin Ong, the President of the Senate, in his Introduction. There are also tributes to him by other noted Malaysians in this book. My sincere thanks are due to all of them.

The writing of this book has been made possible mainly by the information given to me by Encik Zainal Abidin bin Haji Alias, a former Editor of Utusan Melayu, and also from other sources.

Above all, I am deeply indebted to Tan Sri Noah for the several interviews he granted me in order to enable me to write this biography.

It is hoped that this story of a multi-talented man will prove an inspiration not only to the present generation but also to future Malaysians of all races and creeds.

The author takes this opportunity to offer his apology for any shortcomings in the writing of the biography of Tan Sri Mohamed Noah.



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TAKA SANG  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA

## CHAPTER 1

# The Man and His Philosophy

*Everybody likes and respects self-made men. It is a great deal better to be made that way than not to be made at all.*

—*Oliver Wendell Holmes*

It was an old friend of Tan Sri Haji Mohamed Noah who suggested that I write his biography. There is already a book on Tan Sri Noah by my old colleague, Encik Zainal Abidin bin Haji Alias, AMN, BBM, popularly known as Zabha, a former editor of *Utusan*

*Melayu*. It is in Bahasa Kebangsaan and it is mainly for a Malay audience.

So my friends and the friends of Tan Sri Noah felt the need for a book in English because he has had a distinguished career as a senior government official, a legislator, as Speaker of Parliament and later as President of the Senate of Malaysia.

When I was ushered into Tan Sri Noah's office I was amazed to see a man who looks 65, though he is already 78. He was sitting behind a large desk. He sat there attending to a big pile of correspondence. Often he was interrupted by telephone calls followed by giving instructions to Alice, his private secretary.

Tan Sri Noah is a calm, cool and collected man. This fact enabled me to study him from close quarters and get as much information as possible from him. In fact he spoke freely and frankly and invited me to shoot any questions I wished to ask him. This I did.

He told me in reply to my question that his philosophy is to be patient, to be tolerant and to be fair.

"I believe every Malaysian, be he a Malay, a Chinese or an Indian has something to say and has every right to be heard. I have always adhered to this principle throughout my career especially during the period when I had the privilege of serving as the Speaker of Parliament and later as the President of the Senate," he assured me.

He mastered the art of getting along with people of all castes and creeds especially those who worked under or with him. So much so his associates are those "willing to bend over backwards" to make things work smoothly.

My first impression of Tan Sri Noah is that he comes alive through his experiences. He is alert, active and always cheerful.

He belongs to that rare group of happy people who says things that avert disasters when angry feelings rise. He uses words that calm the waters. That is why he remains strong and steady when others fall to pieces.

Despite considerable pressure of work with as many as ten to twenty company board meetings a month and visits to various parts of Malaysia, Singapore and overseas, he is a typical family man of domestic habits and affections with strong family pride. He has also time for the common touch. He seldom forgets a face and often remembers small courtesies.

To a large extent it was his education in the cosmopolitan city of Beirut that widened his horizon.

Furthermore, his Muslim learning and liberal views have enabled him to welcome and accept the changes that have been and still are taking place in Malaysia.

This is one reason why he was successful not only in the Civil Service but also as the Speaker of Parliament. Today he ranks as one of the most successful bumiputras in business. His knack of working

together with people of all races reminds me of what Henry Ford, the builder of an automobile empire once said: "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress and working together is success."

It is said that if you want to do a thing well, do it yourself. Tan Sri Noah believes in this. He is a stickler for details. Evidence of this quality of his was afforded to me when he opened the boot of his Mercedes Benz which was filled to the brim with all sorts of foodstuffs and other things for our holiday at Sri Genting, his house at the hill resort. He does the marketing every time he goes to Genting Highlands. He brings foodstuffs and other necessities not only for himself and his family but also for his staff and for Dewa, his Persian cat, a popular member of the household.

He is meticulous down to the last detail in planning his programme of work or even his travel and holidays.

### HIS COURT JUDGEMENTS

His qualities of compassion, his humility of character and his integrity of thought, word and deed were demonstrated time and time again when he was a magistrate in Johore.

To give only two instances, here are the true stories told to me by a mutual friend.

Once a Chinese farmer was charged before him for illicit distilling of liquor. The man was convicted and fined \$250 — in default three months imprisonment.

On hearing the sentence, the accused burst into tears. When Mohamed Noah asked why the accused was crying, the accused told him that he had no money and because he had to go to jail, there would be no one to look after his only child as his wife was dead.

On hearing this pathetic story, Mohamed Noah asked the accused if he would allow him to adopt the child. The accused agreed.

Mohamed Noah sought the advice of the Protector of Chinese Affairs in Johore Bharu, who arranged the adoption of the child according to the law then prevailing. With all the formalities finalised, Mohamed Noah, in appreciation of being permitted to adopt the child, paid the fine and released the man.

"This man used to visit my home regularly to see his daughter. Sometimes he brought sugar-cane and other small gifts for his daughter," said Mohamed Noah. Then I discovered that Tan Sri Noah and his late wife, Maimuna had adopted as many as five children - three Chinese and two Malay babies. They educated all of them and when the time came, he got them all married.

Equally interesting is the other story. On one occasion he convicted a man under a certain enactment and sent him to jail.

Soon afterwards he found out to his horror, he had made a big mistake. He had referred to an old enactment in convicting the poor man! Mohamed Noah immediately appealed against his own judgement and sought a revision of his sentence.

When the appeal went to the High Court, the judge complimented Mohamed Noah for his moral courage in righting a wrong he had done. The convicted man was then released from jail.

Tan Sri Noah explained that when he convicted the man he was not aware that the enactment that he had referred to had already been repealed.

Once Mohamed Noah told me, "I give my mind to disciplined direction."

No wonder despite stresses and strains, he stands serene and sane.

During his extensive travels around the world he has met many famous people.

He confessed to me: "President Sadat, who was then the Speaker of Parliament of the United Arab Republic, whom I met in Cairo taught me to take life philosophically and to control myself during periods of stress and strain."

The late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, a former Prime Minister of India, impressed him immensely and "to a great extent influenced my own political thinking and philosophy."

Recognition of his long and loyal service to the State and nation came to him on several occasions. In fact few Malaysians have been honoured in the way he has been. The decorations he has been conferred are: Pingat Ibrahim Sultan (P.I.S.) on 17th Sept. 1947; Setia Mahkota Johore (S.M.J.) on 17th September 1948, Justice of the Peace (J.P.) on 17th September 1951, Dato Paduka Makhota Johore (D.P.M.J.) on 17th September, 1955, Sri Paduka Makhota Johore (S.P.M.J.) on 10th February 1960, Dato Paduka Makhota Brunei (D.P.M.B.) on 22nd September 1960 and Pangkuan Makhota Negara (P.M.N.) on 7th June 1963.

He was conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by the University of the Republic of Korea on the occasion of his visit to that country as the leader of the Federation of Malaya Parliamentary Delegation on September 10, 1963.

During an interview once I put the following questions to him: Who influenced you most in your life? "My religious teacher, the late Tuan Haji Abu Bakar bin Haji Hassan, was the one who influenced me most. Had it not been for his appeal to my mother, I would not have been allowed to go to Beirut with other students, as I was her only son."

It was from Tuan Haji Abu Bakar that he learned to live by a strong moral code.

Which position in your career gave you the greatest happiness and satisfaction: as Magistrate, as District Officer or as the Speaker of Parliament?

“I think the speakership gave me much happiness. First and foremost, I was able to hear from the people’s representatives the problems faced by the country and how they had been solved by the Government. However, it was as District Officer that I was able to keep constantly in touch with people of all walks of life especially the peasants and the poor.”

To my question whether he was not appalled by the responsibilities of the Speaker, Tan Sri Noah said, “There was no time for thinking if the job was appalling or if it was pleasant. In fact, I was thrilled and dazzled by the opportunity. I knew I had an important job to do and I did what I could. Responsibilities don’t frighten me because I am quite relaxed most of the time.”

Speaking of his various interests, travelling, reading and meeting people, he said, “Travel is what I like most. I travel with my eyes “open”. In other words, I see good things, and try to bring back ideas to be introduced in our country.”

Asked to comment on the things he dislikes most, he said. “I dislike quite a lot of things including cruelty to animals, but what I dislike most are the people who cheat others and people who do not keep promises. Also I do not like “waste”.

“What books and magazines I read? *The Readers’ Digest* because it contains articles on various subjects by eminent people. It is also light reading. I like reading biographies of famous people of the world. During my early days I liked to read detective stories.”

Tan Sri Noah admits his travels have widened his horizon. “One important lesson I have learned is to take heart from the experiences of others, never to feel dejected and hope for the best,” he said.

“I have never missed a chance to make good. I was determined to work hard to achieve my ambition. It is work, work and more work that has resulted in the success I have had so far”.

Of all the countries he has travelled, Mecca made the greatest impression on him, “because it is a holy city of great significance to us Muslims.”

“The code I live by is to be self-reliant, to have faith in Allah and to do my duty as I think right without fear or favour,” he added.

### A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

When asked to say something about the factors that have helped him to achieve success in life, Tan Sri Noah quoted this popular Arabic saying:



## TAN SRI MOHAMED NOAH

This is the story of an illustrious son of Malaysia — Tan Sri Mohamed Noah bin Omar, who has had a distinguished career in the Civil Service and as the Speaker of Parliament and later as the President of Senate.

This portrait is based in part on the impressions and memories of several friends and associates.

This intimate biography by a noted Malaysian author describes the many-sided life of this well-known man. A fitting tribute to his qualities of tolerance and integrity is paid by Datuk Haji Mohamed Asri bin Haji Muda, the Minister of Lands and Regional Development, Malaysia. His piece on Tan Sri Noah appears elsewhere in this book.

Recalling his impressions of Tan Sri as the Speaker of Parliament, Datuk Asri says this among other things: “On one occasion, a member of the Opposition was criticising the Government. Tempers were high. The Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, stood up and wanted to reply to a point raised by the Opposition member. The Opposition member refused to give way but the Tunku said he did not care whether the Opposition member gave way or not. I looked hard at Tan Sri and was wondering what he was going to do.

Suddenly he ruled, “Sit down both of you! As the Speaker it is my duty to control the House. I do not want to see any disorderly happening in the House. Each member has a right to speak and he must comply with the Standing Orders. Any member wishing to interrupt another member must do so according to the Standing Orders.”

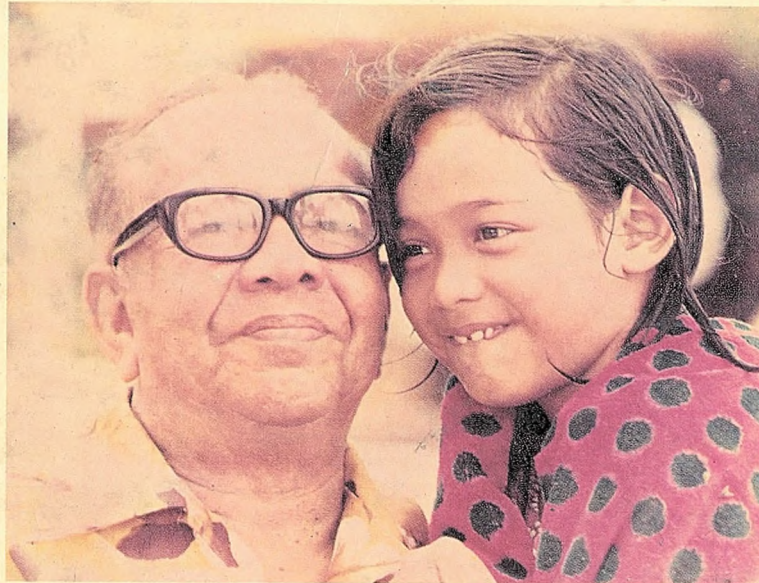
The Tunku then sat down. This action of Tan Sri Noah clearly shows that he is made of a sterner stuff and has the courage of his convictions. It also demonstrates that not only in the House of Representatives but also in the Senate, he acted without fear or favour.

The reader will no doubt discover many of the other qualities of this man by going through the various chapters in this book. By his achievement Tan Sri Noah has become quite a legend in his own time. He remains indelibly the same person:

In summing up one’s impressions of Tan Sri Noah one is reminded of the words of a famous American:

“It is my heritage to stand erect, proud and unafraid, to think and act for myself, enjoy the benefit of my creations and to face the world boldly and say: This I have done.”

These words, indeed, sum up the career, character and philosophy of Tan Sri Noah.



Tan Sri Noah with Izan, his first great-grand-daughter, born in Melbourne, Australia. This picture was taken during his visit to Penang in 1974.

## AN INSPIRATION TO OTHERS..... . . .

In the service he was not content to be like other government servants. He studied to improve himself, worked hard to serve the State and the people, and eventually took his pension after a distinguished service. But unlike others he did not retire. He took up a political career so that he could be of further service to the country, finally occupying the great office of Speaker of the House of Representatives where he controlled the proceedings with tact and good humour.

Malays marvel most at Tan Sri Noah's success in the world of business and commerce achieved after his retirement from the Johore Civil Service. He was successful because he could recognise a business opportunity, he knew how and when to seize it, and of course sometimes he took risks, but he had courage and a modicum of luck. Tan Sri Noah began to show his flair for business and to demonstrate that he could make a go of it, soon after he had become a pensioner in the early fifties. Those who know him well are aware that he has achieved success without depending on or expecting relatives in high places to give him a helping hand.

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Tun Justice Mohamed Suffian,  
Lord President of the Courts  
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