

A portrait of A.M. Tunku Naquiyuddin ibni Tuanku Ja'afar, a man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and blue tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. His hands are clasped in front of him, and he is wearing a watch on his left wrist. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some vertical light streaks.

A SUCCESSION OF DESTINIES

My life, in stories.

A.M. TUNKU NAQUIYUDDIN IBNI TUANKU JA'AFAR

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To YAB Tun Dr. Mahathir ,

It is a privilege to present
to you my first book!

Wazari

17 February 2019

A SUCCESSION OF DESTINIES

Y.A.M. TUNKU NAQUIYUDDIN IBNI TUANKU JA'AFAR



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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For my father, who taught me
to learn,
lead,
and succeed.



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With my wife, Tunku Nurul Hayati.



PROLOGUE

THE HOST

Images can be misleading. If the only photos you have seen of me are the ones in the society pages, you might think that I enjoy only a certain type of social event: black tie, protocol, names embossed on place cards, silverware involving no fewer than four kinds of forks.

In truth, such formal functions make up only a small part of my social calendar, which also includes casual dinner parties, Hari Raya open houses, *kenduri* (feasts), religious gatherings and other events large and small, planned and impromptu, animated and quiet. Technology is always giving us new ways to socialise, but I prefer connecting the old-fashioned way: in person.

I am happy when friends invite me to their events, even happier when I am playing host. My wife Tunku Nurul Hayati shares my passion for entertaining, and we have hosted many social events here in our beloved Malaysia—in Kuala Lumpur, where we live, and in my home state of Negeri Sembilan, to whose royal family I belong.

We find it immensely rewarding to bring people together. At the same time,

planning a social event, especially a big one, entails numerous considerations: the venue and menu; the date and time (and KL traffic); whether or not to have a theme (for my 70th birthday we chose *The Godfather*); music; who can be seated together, and who must be kept at opposite corners of the banquet hall (fortunately, these are not capos of warring Italian crime families with long-standing grievances). Which brings us to the biggest question of all: whom shall we—and must we—invite?

It all sounds like a headache, and an unnecessary one at that: any food-loving Malaysian knows that in life it is seldom necessary to have an oyster fork, a salad fork, a dinner fork and a dessert fork. Stop wasting time. Start eating.

So why bother? What has social interaction—the art and practice of it—brought to my life? This is what makes the effort worthwhile: the conversation, the laughter, the orchestrated details that give way to spontaneity, the learning, the reminiscing, the energy, the new friends made and the old ones rediscovered. The sparkle. For the host, it is the moment when you see that everyone present is completely at ease and exactly where they wish to be.

Often, it is the host who must lead the conversation. I am partial to history, languages, sports and business. In a quieter and more reflective setting, you might find me eager to talk about destiny, which I firmly believe in. As for politics and religion, we are taught to steer clear of these topics in polite company—but sometimes the company steers itself wherever it wishes to go.

When guests are left to their own devices, I am curious to see who unexpectedly hits it off with whom, and conversely, which pairings fizzle out before the appetizers are served. Drafting the guest list is a deliberate act—my attempt to shape destiny by determining who will be present—but ultimately I have no control over any chain of events that might be triggered at this get-together that I have organised. Friendships, business deals or, God forbid, long-standing grievances?

Observing—always observing—is another hallmark of a good host.

If all goes well, the evening assumes a rhythm and life of its own. It builds, then ebbs; then it comes to an end and everyone goes back to their lives. In between the parties, lives must be lived. But life can also encompass social life; indeed, this has been one of the principal ways by which I have learnt about the world.

In contrast, the reflection needed in order to take stock of one's own life—in preparation for writing a book, for example—is a solitary endeavour. It is no easy task. To get through it, I had to pretend I was hosting an imaginary dinner party of

my different selves. Whom did I invite?

The Chairman of Antah, once among the larger and more diversified conglomerates in Malaysia, and the Second Secretary at the Malaysian Embassy in Paris in the 1970s—they had some stories to tell. The Regent of Negeri Sembilan who many assumed would become Ruler of his state and, at some point, Ruler of Malaysia; he had his views on royalty. There was also the history buff, the sports fan and the Pro-Chancellor who kept stressing the importance of education. The entrepreneur who wanted to make two things: profit and a difference (he was also very interested in mosquitoes and solar panels). The philanthropist with his fundraising activities. The patron of fine dining, rugby and marathons (quite a multifarious mix). And—since children are so often sent to bed and excluded from functions—I invited that boy from the 1950s who ran away from home with his life savings in an Ovaltine tin.

One day, such a gathering of the many versions of me—Tunku Naquiyuddin Ibni Tuanku Ja'afar—might actually be possible with technology. In the meantime, they can all meet in this book, whose general structure is chronological, with a few exceptions. Who will get along with whom? What will they exchange by way of stories and anecdotes, amusing and nostalgic? What will they say to one another about shaping and following their destinies?

No one dreams your dreams for you
You pick the road you take
The choice is yours and yours alone
The journey you should make
As time goes by and landscapes change
Your dreams may alter too
But the choice to shape your destiny
Will always be with you

—from *The Road*, Dato' Steve Day



THE BOY

Bedtime stories for children feature the simplest version of monarchy: there is a kingdom, a palace, a king, queen and prince. There is a crown, which is passed from father to son. In some tales there are variations—the reigning monarch is a queen and not a king, the heir to the throne is a princess and not a prince, or the new monarch is a sibling—but there is nothing in these variations that pulls the story too far from the familiar concept of hereditary monarchy.

I was born in 1947 in Seri Menanti, a quiet town in the state of Negeri Sembilan. It derives its serenity from its relative seclusion—the town is surrounded by lush green hills with just a few narrow *kampung* roads leading to neighbouring villages—and also from the fact that there is an *istana* (palace) at its heart that radiates a sense of tranquillity. Seri Menanti is the royal capital of Negeri Sembilan; and yet as surely as the palace is located at the centre of the town, it is also quite a distance away from the neat and tidy idea of hereditary monarchy as described in Western fairy tales.

My father and mother both spent at least some of their childhood years in Seri Menanti, but I myself never did. The year after I was born, my father (then 26 years old) was accepted at the University of Nottingham in the UK to study law, and my mother, my older sister, my younger brother and I followed him there. I did not grow up in Seri Menanti, and yet this town holds great significance for me—and thinking about it leads me to reflect on what I knew as a boy and when I knew it.

One of the first things a child learns is his or her name. I would have learnt very early on that while I was “Abang” (big brother) in the family, outside of my immediate family my name was never just “Naquiyuddin”—it was “Tunku Naquiyuddin”. I was also known as “Bill”—“Bill Ja’afar” when I was in the UK, where I spent a great deal of my childhood, and “Tunku Bill” whenever I was in Malaysia. This was shortened to “Kubill”, which I myself mispronounced as “Kubih”, and this is what my older sister calls me till today. As a child I would have realised that everyone else in my family was also a Tunku; my father was Tunku Ja’afar, my mother Tunku Najihah, my older sister Tunku Naquiah and my younger brother Tunku Imran. I don’t remember exactly when I worked out that this meant we were the royal family of Negeri Sembilan.

We returned to Malaya after my father completed his studies in England in 1952. We lived in various parts of the Peninsula but made frequent trips to Seri Menanti. My mother had grown up in Seri Menanti, and when we visited the town we would often stay at my maternal grandmother’s house. We would also visit my paternal grandfather, Tuanku Abdul Rahman. He lived in the Istana Besar (the Grand Palace), and while everyone I knew in my family was a “Tunku”, he alone had the distinction of being addressed as “Tuanku”. This, I was informed as a child, meant that my grandfather was the Yang di-Pertuan Besar, or Ruler, of Negeri Sembilan—although I cannot remember when I grasped the true import of this information. The Yang di-Pertuan Besar, incidentally, is also known as the Yamtuan—but my siblings and I used neither of those terms, preferring instead to call our Ruler-grandfather “Tok Tuanku”.

By 1956 I was again in England, beginning the first of many school terms spent abroad at boarding school. In August of 1957 I was back in Malaya for the holidays. I was 10, just about old enough to understand the grown-ups’ talk about the imminent independence of Malaya and the introduction of a system of elective monarchy for this new country with 11 states, nine of which had their own royal

houses. Under the new system, the Rulers of the nine states would choose one of their number to serve as the country's Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Supreme Ruler or King) for a five-year term. This rotation at the national level would not affect any pre-existing systems of hereditary monarchy within the nine states.

Elective monarchy was a departure from the fairy-tale version but it made intuitive sense, even to a 10-year old boy, and seemed to follow naturally from the structure of our new country. Likewise, I did not have any difficulty understanding that my grandfather was to be accorded by his peers the historic honour of being the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong. (Since 1967, his portrait has been featured on every ringgit note.)

On the other hand, certain things at the state level in Negeri Sembilan were more difficult to comprehend. In 1960, my grandfather passed away. His eldest son—my father's older half-brother Tunku Munawir—became the new Yang di-Pertuan Besar and was henceforth known as "Tuanku Munawir". I was 13 at the time and was probably not yet old enough to understand how, in accordance with the state's royal traditions, the new Ruler came to be selected. In Negeri Sembilan there is no system of hereditary monarchy, and in this regard it is unique among the Malaysian states.

A useful starting point in understanding the Negeri system is the fact that among the many Tunkus (princes and princesses) in the royal family, four male Tunkus are deemed to be the most senior. They are known as the "Putera Yang Empat", that is, the "Four Titled Princes" or "Four Senior Princes". Within the group of four, there is again an element of seniority: the Tunku Besar Seri Menanti is the most senior followed by the Tunku Laksamana, then the Tunku Muda Serting and finally the Tunku Panglima Besar.

Certain aspects of this system might lead one to conclude that there is a high degree of predictability in the matter of succession in Negeri Sembilan. First, only a Titled Prince may become the Yang di-Pertuan Besar. Secondly, it is traditionally the most senior of the Putera Yang Empat—the Tunku Besar Seri Menanti—who is chosen as the Yang di-Pertuan Besar.

Thirdly, looking back at history, a pattern emerges: many of Negeri Sembilan's Rulers were in fact succeeded by their sons. When the sixth Ruler Yamtuan Antah passed away in 1888, his son Tuanku Muhammad became the seventh Ruler. Tuanku Muhammad's son, Tuanku Abdul Rahman, in turn became the eighth Ruler, and Tuanku Abdul Rahman's son Tuanku Munawir became the ninth Ruler. In fact, the

Constitution of Negeri Sembilan of 1959 specifies that when a Ruler passes away, the new Ruler is to be chosen first from among the sons of the deceased Ruler (and only if this is not possible is the choice then to be made from among the deceased Ruler's brothers, paternal uncles, grandsons, sons of his brothers and, finally, sons of his paternal uncles). The new Ruler, incidentally, is to be selected before the deceased Ruler is buried.

Taken together, these facts appear to suggest predictability and even heredity—but there is still one final, crucial detail: ultimately, the decision about who becomes the Yang di-Pertuan Besar lies entirely in the hands of the state's four *Undang* (ruling chiefs). These are the chiefs of the four most important *luak* (chiefdoms) in Negeri Sembilan, and how they came to wield such power in the selection of the Ruler has to do with what occurred in 1773. That was the year the *Undang*, in search of a new Ruler after the Johor Sultanate was no longer able to protect them and their people, invited Raja Melewar of Sumatra to fill the role. Ever since, the *Undang* have retained the right to choose the Ruler of Negeri Sembilan, and because they possess this prerogative, there is always the possibility of a surprise outcome.

Certainly, they surprised many in 1967 when they decided not to select Tunku Muhriz, the Tunku Besar Seri Menanti at the time (and the son of the late Tuanku Munawir, the ninth Yang di-Pertuan Besar) as the 10th Ruler. Instead they selected the Tunku Muda Serting—my father, Tuanku Ja'afar, who was Tuanku Abdul Rahman's son and Tuanku Munawir's younger half-brother.

As a young boy, I did not yet understand the intricacies of this system. Furthermore, learning the details about one's royal status was one thing but being able to articulate them to others was another challenge altogether. At boarding school in England, I was mostly known as the son of a diplomat (my father's occupation during those years). This was a good thing not only because I was accorded the same treatment as everyone else, but also because it saved me from questions that inevitably required complex answers.

The three-year period from 1957 to 1960 (when I was 10 to 13 years old) would have been the simplest in terms of responding to queries about my royal status. This was the time when I could say with simplicity and accuracy: "I am the grandson of the King of Malaya." Of course, such an answer would only have sufficed had the question been of a general nature along the lines of "Who are you?" Other questions

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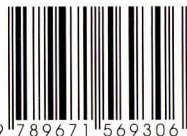
At 20, he witnessed his father being installed as Ruler of Negeri Sembilan, and wondered if he, too, would one day succeed the throne—or did his destiny lie elsewhere?

One of the most recognisable of Malaysian princes, Tunku Naquiyuddin Tuanku Ja'afar today is known as much for being a prominent corporate figure as for being one of the most senior members of the Negeri Sembilan royal family. He is also a familiar face on the social scene.

In these pages, a portrait emerges of a man who has mastered the nuances of the many worlds he inhabits and is thus able to balance a Malaysian perspective alongside Western traditions; centuries-old palace protocol alongside modern-day corporate culture; high-society do's and don'ts alongside everyday human interactions.

Tunku Naquiyuddin shares his story here, taking readers on a singular journey from post-war Malaya to boarding school and university in Britain, and onwards to the diplomatic circuit in Paris and the boardrooms of Kuala Lumpur. It is a story of family, friendships, work, purpose, values—and shaping one's destiny.

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