

It is always a pleasure to return for visits to Penang for whatever reason. This is more so knowing that Penang is the state that Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, our beloved founding father, chose to retire to upon his graceful withdrawal in 1970 as the Pre Independence Chief Minister of Malaya and the first Prime Minister of Malaya and Malaysia. In this regard, I cannot thank Dato' Seri Haji Mohd Yussof Latiff, Chairman of the Penang State Consultative Goodwill Council, enough for his having invited me to launch a collection of quotations reflecting the Tunku's wisdom and keen observations of politics and the social fusion that make up the Malaysian melting pot and the societal issues that popped up their ugly heads once in a while. I would also like to thank the Goodwill Council for seeing it fit to have me at this gathering that is simultaneously the celebration of its 10th anniversary. Please accept my heartiest congratulations on this undertaking and on achieving your 10th milestone.

2. The collection, aptly named "Enduring truths from statements and words of Al-Marhum Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj our beloved founder of our nation", to mark the 111th anniversary of the Tunku's birth on 8th February, 1903 is without doubt a most useful collectible as our founding father is without peers and has been assured of a place in Malaysian as well as World histories. More importantly, it is a good source of information on the Tunku for the Generation Y, those who came into the world during the period 1961 – 81 and, to an extent, the Generation X, who were born between 1961 and 1981.

3. Getting to know our founding father through his wise words will mitigate, in some ways, the denial to these generations the story of our independence. It will also make familiar the Tunku's critical role in nursing it through as was symbolically visualised and auralised by his spirited cry of Merdeka that echoed across the newly-built Merdeka Stadium after declaring the Proclamation of Independence on 31st August, 1957. The Merdeka story bears reminding and retelling because there are mischievous quarters that would rather consign the Tunku's pivotal role to the dustbin of history. Obscene though this may sound, there is the odd megalomaniacal displeasure with the Tunku to the extent of denying his role in the birth of the Federation of Malaya, which together with Sabah, Sarawak and initially Singapore went on to form Malaysia. In this regard, he was known to have been saddened by a certain history textbook that took the same line to ignore that role.

4. At this juncture, please allow me to ask a rhetorical question – what could one say about the Tunku? I would hasten to answer, a lot. I can most certainly go on recounting about the man I have the greatest affection for. Truly, he was, and still is, our original towering Malaysian; a personality without equal. He was the quintessential gentleman – a humble and unassuming blue blood at ease with the man in the street – best remembered as the first among equals, of our founding fathers. However, it bears reminding that there are not a few of us Malaysians who

The Tunku

Written by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah
Saturday, 31 May 2014 00:00 -

would have the Tunku buried in the anonymous sand of time and history. Their vindictiveness is such that they are not averse to denying the Tunku his gigantic and noble role and contributions to found this proud and dignified sovereign State blessed with diversified riches and wealth. On this, the Tunku was known to have been saddened by a particular history textbook which chose to remain silent on his historic and pivotal role in gaining independence for our beloved country.

5. However, we should not, we must not, be distracted by this aberration, as it were. It is with this in mind that I propose to look at the Tunku as the founding father of our beloved nation, the humble and unassuming prince much loved by Malaysians of every shade and walk of life, and the statesman much respected by the world. I am therefore proposing to reflect upon our Bapa Kemerdekaan for the next several minutes to get a glimpse of the Tunku's greatness as the peerless leader of Malaysia. More importantly, it is hoped that this will act as a gentle reminder to young Malaysians of his selflessness to forfeit the palatial luxuries of his birth to serve his countrymen. Given that his was a larger-than-life personality, one could talk about any number of areas where the Tunku had created impacts. But I propose to only highlight his place and role in the Merdeka mission, his absolute belief in harmony among the races as a cornerstone to build an independent Malaysia and a glimpse of the respect he commanded as a statesman of international repute. Again, stories abound on these but I will merely highlight an anecdote or two to make the point.

6. Ladies and gentlemen, the overwhelming success of the first ever cooperation between a Malay and Chinese political parties in the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Election of 1952, which they won with a landslide, encouraged the Tunku to approach local elections in other states as a joint effort by an alliance between UMNO and MCA. His conviction that this interracial unity and cooperation was a winning formula led this newly formalised Alliance Party, with MIC as the third partner, to romp off to an almost absolute victory in the general election of 1955. History tells us that the Alliance won 51 of the 52 seats contested, with the 52nd being taken by an independent candidate. This, if you will, was in the eyes of the Tunku the first shot across the bow giving notice that the country was ready to fight for independence as the condition by the colonial authority, the existence and practice of racial unity, had been met.

7. He was then made the Chief Minister leading a Cabinet of 10 members thereby giving notice that he and the Alliance were ready to lead Malaya to independence. This then was the state of play when Britain's Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd visited Kuala Lumpur. His discussions with the Sultans and the Cabinet helped to speed up the grinding wheel from self government to total independence. Lennox-Boyd intimated to the Tunku as Chief Minister that Britain was agreeable to hold constitutional talks in London in January 1956 provided the Sultans were represented. As a result, the Merdeka mission, as those talks came to be popularly known collectively, consisted of two delegations, one each representing the Malay rulers and the Alliance. The group representing the Alliance had a good representation of

The Tunku

Written by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah
Saturday, 31 May 2014 00:00 -

the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians as Tunku believed that Malayan nationalism needed to accommodate especially the desires of the Malays and Chinese. In his view, the sectoral nationalism of the two communities could be used as the base for forging a Malayan nation. I think herein lies a man who truly believes in harmony between races, and he practised it through the adoption of children outside his racial group into his family.

8. The two groups travelled together by a passenger liner that sailed off for Karachi from Singapore. The popular talk of the day was that the Tunku chose this leisurely mode of travel to provide for the two parties to iron out any ticklish issue so as to present a united stand to Whitehall. They had daily meetings during the journey and it is a credit to their wisdom, patience, tolerance and ability to compromise for the greater good that they succeeded in finalising a draft proposal of the Malayan Constitution upon reaching Karachi. By the time they, as the Merdeka Mission, met Lennox-Boyd at Lancaster House in the vicinity of the Buckingham Palace, it was unanimously agreed that the Tunku would be the leader of both delegations. This, most certainly, reflected his flair for leadership and being at ease with it.

9. In a lighter vein, it is perhaps the right moment to show the humorous side of the happiest Prime Minister in the world. During the solemn signing ceremony of the Merdeka Agreement on 8th February, 1956 – on his 53rd birthday, incidentally – the Tunku could not resist saying to Lennox-Boyd that he was making right the “wrong” of his ancestor, his great-great-great grandfather Sultan Abdullah II, who ushered in the start of British influence by offering Penang as a trading station to the East India Company in return for help against the Bugis of Selangor who were fighting him.

10. Ladies and gentlemen, the Tunku’s tolerance for all things and everything, and especially racial tolerance, is legendary. He was very forgiving, a sincere God-fearing man who would dismiss howlers and clangers with his infectious laughter. Gifted with the righteous quality to see good in everybody, the Tunku was not averse to light-heartedly remarking “langau dah mai”, literally the bluebottles are here, to reporters who went to The Residency, the then official residence of the Prime Minister, for news or for follow-ups. Every reporter of his time would have you know that the Tunku was the darling of the Press corps. He had time for every one of them, regardless of rank or seniority. These reporters would tell anyone who cared to listen that the Tunku was charm personified who would bowl you over with his charisma.

11. Lest we forget, please allow me to jog our collective memory on the naming of the Masjid Negara. The national mosque was proposed to be named the Masjid Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. But true to his humility, the great man politely declined the honour and instead named it Masjid Negara upon its completion in 1965. It was also due to the strength of his

popularity as the Prime Minister that generous donations from all walks of life were collected to fund its construction.

12. Another edifice that will continually be remembered as the brainchild of the Tunku and mentioned in the same breath as his name is the Merdeka Stadium spoken of earlier. Given his love for sports and having represented St. Catherine's football team during his Cambridge days, the Tunku pushed for a purpose-built football stadium when he became the Chief Minister. And the stadium became a readily available venue for the declaration of independence. The stadium also became the venue for the Merdeka Tournament. He had started the competition to commemorate the country's independence and it went to become the showpiece of Asian football competitions.

13. His love for football went deeper than his passion for sports and games. The Tunku sincerely and deeply believed that sports are a powerful and effective medium to bring about unity and racial harmony, with youths having the critical role to achieve the desired goal. He himself walked the talk by being the president of both the Football Association of Malaya and Asian Football Confederation. More than that, he created the Youth & Sports portfolio in his Cabinet, naming himself the minister, in addition to his being the Prime Minister. His belief was rewarded when Malaysian footballers, hockey players and athletes became household names around the region. I am sure we still remember these names – Abdul Ghani Minhat, Soh Chin Aun, Santokh Singh, Mokhtar Dahari, Poon Fook Loke, Sri Shanmuganathan, Rabuan Pit, Marina Chin, M Jegathesan, among others. They were comfortable with each other. They teased and pulled each other's leg. They called each other names. They did not take any offence. They were harmoniously united and Tunku had made his point with the setting up of the Ministry.

14. Ladies and gentlemen, a trait of the Tunku that is not talked about as often was his stature as a statesman of renown. For instance, at the 1960 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London he was the first to criticise South Africa for its apartheid policy. This led to that republic leaving the Commonwealth of Nations and its subsequent ouster from the United Nations. The Daily Express of London reported that Tunku was hard hitting but never lost his genial and charming manner. Apparently this was not lost on King Feisal of Saudi Arabia. On a State Visit to Malaysia in 1970 His Majesty asked the Tunku to take on the job of organising Islamic unity. To say that it was a difficult task is to understate its enormity. The intention was for Tunku to head the Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers [the forerunner of the Organisation of Islamic Conference] as its Secretary-General. Tunku demurred, mentioning that he was not averse, every now and then, to such worldly pleasures as horse-racing and a round or two of card games. According to Tunku, King Feisal responded: "I know, but I am not asking you to be the Imam of Islam, only to ask you to help organise Muslim unity." King Feisal, himself an accomplished diplomat as his father's, King Abdul Aziz al Saud's, foreign minister

The Tunku

Written by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah
Saturday, 31 May 2014 00:00 -

obviously knew a gem when he saw one.

15. The geniality and charm of Tunku as observed by the Daily Express was not lost upon Queen Elizabeth II. There was mutual respect for each other and Tunku never failed to send a bouquet of orchids every year on the monarch's birthday. Her affinity for the Tunku was such that when she was in KL to open the 16th Commonwealth Games in 1998, Her Majesty requested to see him in Penang. That request spoke volumes about the elder statesman and the respect he commanded from the Head of the Commonwealth of Nations, as I am sure was the deference to him by many other Heads of States.

In concluding my reflection of the Tunku, I would repeat that well-known Shakespearean line – some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. Tunku, I would submit, was all three. He was born in an istana, the son of a sultan – that's being born great. He gained independence for Malaya and Malaysia, and became the happiest Prime Minister before retiring gracefully as the elder statesman – that's achieving greatness. And, the stalwarts of Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu, in faithfully asking him to stand in the place vacated by Dato' Onn – that's greatness being thrust upon one.

Ladies and gentlemen, I take great pleasure in launching the book "Enduring truths from statements and words of Al-Marhum Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al- Haj." Thank you and good evening.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY Y.B.M. TENGKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH TO LAUNCH THE BOOK "ENDURING TRUTHS FROM STATEMENTS AND WORDS OF AL-MARHUM TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN PUTRA AL-HAJ OUR BELOVED FOUNDER OF OUR NATION"

on Friday, 30.5.14 at 5.00 P.M. at Lecture Theatre 1, Wawasan Open University, Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, Penang, Malaysia.