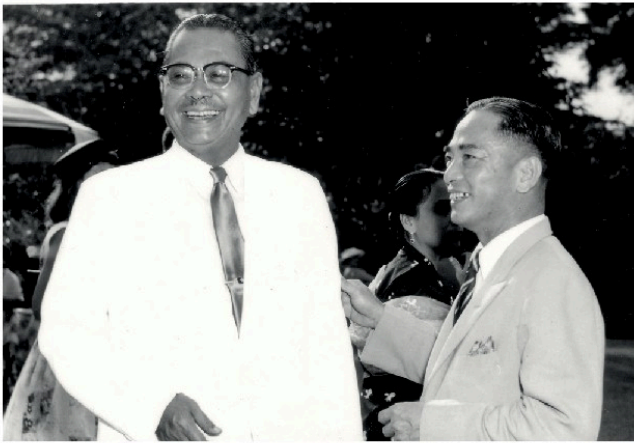


Prince AMONG MEN

As we celebrate 58 years of nationhood this month, we pay tribute to a man who had dedicated his life to making this country a place all can call home – our Bapa Malaysia.

Words By Sharifah Intan Photos RSGC/ Sharifah Intan



TUNKU AND TUN H.S. LEE



TUNKU'S FAMILY IN 1966

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It has been 25 years since Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj passed, but the Tunku, as he is affectionately known, continues to live on in the hearts of Malaysians everywhere. More than being our first Prime Minister, he was loved and revered as the Father of Independence.

In describing Tunku's legacy, former Penang Chief Minister Lim Chong Eu said: "Under Tunku's leadership, the nation had developed every semblance of grace and human intelligence, and of human kindness. It was this spirit of goodwill, of tolerance, of understanding, of wishing the other person well, which Tunku had left behind, and it was this touch of making people from different races, and different walks of life, feel that they are citizens of Malaysia, a part of the same country, and therefore proud to be Malaysian."

Tunku had many accomplishments. Among them was his role in the advancement of sports in the country. This stemmed from his own interests in golf, football and horse racing. "He believed that sports were a way to unite people despite their differences," said his son Tengku Ahmad Nerang. In fact, Tunku started golf diplomacy back in the 1950s where major

issues affecting the country and the region were hammered out on the greens. "Foreign dignitaries like Philippines President Macapagal, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and Sabah's Chief Minister (Tun) Mustapha Harun were frequently invited for a round of golf," said Tengku Nerang.

The genial and astute Tunku used the relaxed atmosphere on the "links" to cultivate friendships of foreign dignitaries and resolve disputes. Tunku did not claim to be an intellectual, but he understood people well. His informal style, humility, sense of humour and soothing character enabled him to achieve great success in politics. He knew that to put people at ease and establish trust was by having good interpersonal relationships. And golf was used adroitly as a political ice-breaker.

The late Raja Perempuan Besar Perlis, Tengku Budriah, in the book *Prince Among Men* related how her husband, the Raja Perlis Tuanku Syed Putra and Tunku (the two Putras) did not care much for protocol except in matters of foreign diplomacy that involved equal treatment and mutual respect between nations.

"Not only did they have the ability to laugh at themselves, they would also allow others to have fun at their own expense.

“Some politicians and would-be leaders can learn a lot from sportsmen. They seem to have lost a sense of balance, have little humour or none at all, treat everything with tremendous and deadly earnestness. They are so serious that sometimes they seem to have forgotten when to smile and be merry”

– Tunku Abdul Rahman

In the beginning of his reign as King, Tuanku Syed Putra did not share the Tunku’s interest in golf. He used to call it a silly game!”

“But Tunku, who was himself a late starter, almost forced him to the Selangor Golf Club. Subsequently Tuanku Syed Putra became so addicted to the game, that he would frequent the Club by himself. The Club was bestowed the title “Royal” in 1963 by Tunku Syed Putra, the reigning Agong at the time. So today it has become known as the Royal Selangor Golf Club.

Tunku would start the day with a round of nine holes at the Club. Journalists would wait around, and more often than not, be rewarded with a scoop. “Whenever possible, Felix Abisheganaden, former journalist with the New Straits Times was assigned to cover Tunku. In Prince Among Men, he recalled, “At one press conference, a foreign journalist had asked him how the title Bapa Malaysia had been conferred on him.

“Actually I didn’t ask anyone to describe me as Bapa this or Bapa that. There is nothing official. I wish people would stop calling me that,” was Tunku’s response.

Then Tunku related how he was embarrassed when as he was about to get into his car one evening after a golf game, a group of caddies at RSGC greeted him with cheers of Bapa Malaysia. With a hearty laugh, he added, “Actually I was feeling tired and wanted a massage. When I heard those chaps saying Bapa Malaysia so enthusiastically, I immediately changed my mind and told the driver to take me to the office where I attended to some unfinished work.”

Caddy Kamaruddin Abdullah aka Pak Din remembered Tunku as a warm and friendly person. “He always had a kind word for us. He was a simple person and had no airs about him. He spoke with his very distinctive Kedah accent.”

CONGENIALITY ON THE COURSE

Other senior members of Tunku’s cabinet were also encouraged to play golf. Tan Siew Sin’s daughter, Tan Siok Choo, related that on one occasion, concerned about Siew Sin’s health and his sedentary lifestyle, the Tunku tried to persuade his Finance Minister to take up golf.

“Having played rugby, football and hockey, Siew Sin regarded golf with considerable disdain. ‘How difficult is it to hit a golf ball into a hole a few hundred yards away?’ he asked.

“Realising persuasion wouldn’t work, the Tunku decided to capitalise on Siew Sin’s well-known dislike for waste. The prime minister ordered a set of made-to-measure golf clubs for Siew Sin. Presented with this expensive gift, Siew Sin had no choice but to sign up for golf lessons.”

His first golf lesson was at RSGC with the Tunku as an interested spectator. A diplomat asked the Tunku about the Finance Minister’s first attempt at golf. “Did the ball go?” the diplomat asked. “Yes, the ball went and so did the Minister,” Tunku said. “With considerable relish, he proceeded to describe Siew Sin’s flying leap after his club hit the ball.” (Tunku and the two Tun Tans).

In those days, there was no fence around the course. On a number of occasions, Tunku would interrupt his golf game to drop in on his friends in the nearby diplomatic enclave. T.K. Critchley, the first Australian High Commissioner to Malaya and subsequently Malaysia, also noted in Prince Among Men, “The Australian residence adjoined the golf course and Tunku knew that, when passing by, he was always welcome to relax at the residence if he felt so inclined.

“On occasions when I had to speak with Tunku, it would be easier for him to find time and certainly more congenial, to meet me early at the course and play nine holes of golf before office hours. Serious talk was of course left until after the game.”

Glennys Yong, wife of the late Edmund Yong, former Captain of RSGC recalled this anecdotal gem. Tunku, then Prime Minister, turned up for a round of golf and was getting ready to tee off at the Old Course when a message was received from the then Captain, Edmund Yong, that as Tunku’s handicap was too high, he was ineligible to play on that course and was politely directed to the New Course.

And Tunku’s response? “I may be the Prime Minister of the country but at RSGC, it is the Captain’s word that counts.” And he moved to the New Course without any fuss.

“The Committee quickly passed a resolution whereby in future all visiting dignitaries including Heads of State, Prime Ministers and the like, should not be subjected to these rules on handicap requirements when playing as guests at our Club.” Tunku’s handicap hovered around 24 while in his 70s.

There are many tales about the Tunku at RSGC, but Tengku

Nerang recalled a particular sad incident. “Tunku was playing with the Sultan of Terengganu and their regular golf partner Dr Chua Sing Kah was supposed to join them. They waited for him and still there was no sign of Dr Chua. So finally, the pair walked over to his house near the then 6th New. They were wondering how he could oversleep and miss his golf game. Dr Chua’s wife Gladys Loke Chua (RSGC/ National tennis champion) ran out to greet them and broke the tragic news that Dr Chua had died. Apparently, no one at the Club had informed them for fear of interrupting their golf game.

“Tunku had a special relationship with RSGC and I used to organise his birthday celebrations there after his retirement,” said Tengku Nerang. “Golf grew to be popular in the country because of Tunku. He wanted people to take an interest in sport. In the 1960s, there were only two golf clubs (of substance) in Malaysia and now golf clubs have mushroomed all over the country.”

ALL IN THE FAMILY

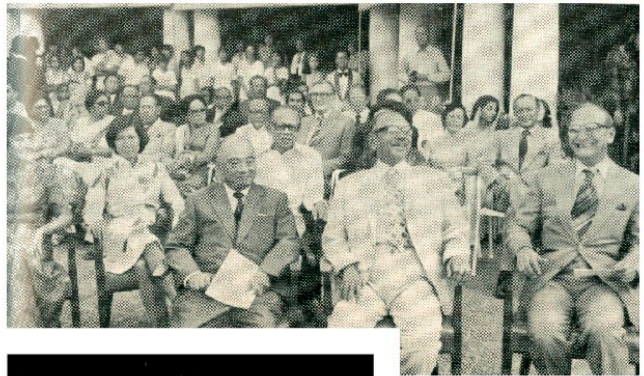
Tengku Nerang’s son Tunku Muinuddin Putra is the spitting image of Tunku as a young man and people usually do a double-take when they see him, including his own father. Tunku Muinuddin recalled with a chuckle that Tengku Nerang thought he had seen Tunku’s ghost when he saw Tunku Muinuddin striding across the green towards the Clubhouse one day. “He was having tea on the terrace and stood up in shock!” laughed Tunku Muinuddin.

“Tunku was a loving grandfather and would often take his older grandchildren to the RSGC for a swim while he played golf. That was my earliest recollection of the family’s relationship with the Club. He always loved to be surrounded by children and would take them everywhere he went!”

“He was the grand patriarch of the family and a strong influence in our lives. To him, family was important but we knew we had to share him with the nation!” said Tunku Muinuddin. Tunku was a devoted grandpa and would literally drop everything for his grandkids and adopted children. Once, Tunku stopped a cabinet meeting in KL to rush over to Ipoh to visit Tunku Muinuddin in hospital (the family was living in Ipoh at the time). The hyperactive two-year-old had accidentally taken an overdose of junior aspirin pills!

Tunku’s love for golf and horses was passed on to his grandchildren and great-grand children and he would have been proud that they are carrying on the sporting tradition. Tunku Muinuddin (RSGC’s Communication and Public Relations Convenor) is a keen golfer. “I took over his expensive Kenneth Smith golf set which helped my golf game immensely,” he said with a laugh.

And his cousin Sharifah Menyalara and her two daughters are accomplished equestrian show jumpers. The two girls recently won silver and bronze medals at the SEA Games in Singapore. ●



PUTRA CUP

One of the major tournaments held to honour Tunku is the Putra Cup. A glittering gold trophy costing a king’s ransom was donated by the Tunku for a Southeast Asia Amateur Team Championship.

In the 25th anniversary souvenir brochure, RSGC Captain Edmund Yong wrote, “The Tunku, as he is popularly known, wished the competition to be played among teams, along the lines of the World Amateur Golf Team Championship for the Eisenhower Cup. The object of the competition would be to foster friendship among the sportsmen of Southeast Asia.”

The inaugural Putra Cup hosted by Malaya on 19 July 1961 at RSGC saw teams from Burma, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and South Vietnam participating. Hong Kong won by a thumping 33 strokes with Singapore, Thailand and Malaya taking the consolation places in that order. The Club continued to host the Putra Cup for the next three years from 1962 to 1964. From the following year onwards, the venue was rotated among the participating countries in alphabetical order.

On its 25th Anniversary in 1986, RSGC played host to the Putra Cup to enable the Tunku to witness the proceedings and the game in comfort as it was too taxing for him to travel overseas at his age. The Cup was later renamed the Tunku Abdul Rahman Cup in tribute to Bapa Malaysia.

The Putra Cup, has since been regarded as the official Southeast Asian team golf championship. It celebrated its golden jubilee in 2010 and made its way to its original home – Malaysia, at its founding home ground at RSGC from 27 September to 1 October 2010.

Putra Cup Source: An informal history of the Royal Selangor Golf Club