



MALAY NATIONALISM BEFORE UMNO

The Memoirs of Mustapha Hussain

**MALAY NATIONALISM BEFORE UMNO:
THE MEMOIRS OF MUSTAPHA HUSSAIN**



Mustapha Hussain

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Translated by Insun Sony Mustapha

Edited by Jomo K. S.

Logo

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Testament

I am not ashamed to declare that my supposed collaboration with the forces of the New Order, as a result of Ibrahim Yaakub's (President of KMM, the Young Malay Union, of which I was Vice President) collusion with Japanese Intelligence before World War II, did not increase the speed of the Japanese juggernaut by one iota, nor the speed of the British retreat from the various fronts, from the mainland of Malaya to Singapore, by one-thousandth of a second.

However, I am proud to claim that I was instrumental in reducing the sufferings of the people by getting them out of the way of the Japanese army, feeding some stranded people, helping the Volunteer Officers and men I met on the way, and saving from certain death at the hands of the Japanese the lives of some ten Intelligence Officers working for the British and the Dutch Governments.

While in Singapore, I concentrated on helping the ex-soldiers and ex-volunteers in every way possible, thus alleviating their sufferings and also preventing them from being detained as Prisoners of War for the duration.

Signed by Mustapha Hussain
Former Vice President of KMM
Matang, Taiping
1976

Acknowledgements

This abridged and edited English translation of Mustapha Hussain's memoirs will appear two decades after his passing. This would not have been possible without the initial translation and other efforts of his devoted daughter, Insun Sony.

Mustapha Hussain's memoirs in Malay entitled *The Memoirs of Mustapha Hussain - The Rise of Malay Nationalism Before UMNO* was posthumously published, thanks to Insun's compilation and the editorial effort of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka editor, Yussop Ishak. It received the nation's highest literary award, Hadiah Sastera Perdana Malaysia (Malaysia's Premier Literary Award) for 1998/1999 in the biography/autobiography category – the first time a book in the category had won the prestigious award in over twenty years.

I have edited this translation very heavily, partly to reduce redundancies, and also to make clearer some historical and cultural references that may not be immediately obvious to many English language readers. Clarissa Koh, Jo-ed Tirol and Insun kindly checked this edited translation. If not for Insun's and Clarissa's voluntary efforts, this translation would not have been prepared for publication. Jo-ed helped us keep in mind the perspective of an uninitiated reader besides adding his editorial hand. I am also grateful for the assistance secured for the preparation of the Index.

Cheah Boon Kheng was also supportive of this project, while Bill Roff kindly agreed to provide an Afterword at short notice.

This is only the latest of several recent and ongoing efforts to highlight the contributions of radical nationalists who gave so much of themselves for the independence of this nation.

Finally, it must be mentioned that Mustapha Hussain dedicated these memoirs to his beloved father, Haji Hussain bin Haji Aminuddin,¹ who died at the ripe old age of 90.

Jomo K. S.
Assistant Secretary General
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations, New York
1 January 2005

Note

1. *Translator's note:* Although my grandfather went through more than his fair share of trials and tribulations, he spent his later years reading, writing and performing his religious obligations with great commitment. But unlike Malay elders then, he only prayed in the mosque on Friday afternoons. Otherwise, he preferred to stay home and spend his time reading and writing between the five daily prayers.

Introduction

Insun Sony Mustapha

This book was translated from a manuscript written in 1976 by my late father, Mustapha Hussain (1910-87). He was the founding Vice President of Malaya's first Malay political party, Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM, or Young Malay Union), that was set up in 1938. A true nationalist, he played a colourful role in the political history of Malaya before and after World War II. At the time of writing, 31 years after World War II ended, Mustapha was already 66 years old. Despite his feeble health and long years of silence, these episodes of his life remained vivid in his mind, resulting in these interesting memoirs.

The story begins with Mustapha's upbringing, a description of Malay society of the time, the arrival of Chinese and Indian immigrants into his hometown Matang, Perak, followed by his Malay and English education (1916-28) in colonial Malaya. He also mentions his early interest in Malay patriotism after listening to stories about the Malay patriots, Datuk Sagor and Datuk Maharajalela, who were hanged by the British just a few hundred metres from his ancestral home in Matang.

Mustapha writes about what Malay poverty was like then, when he was working as an Agricultural Assistant in Tapah (1931-33). He speaks of his anti-colonial feelings, which stemmed from British disregard for the educational, economic and social advancement of Malays, and his frustration with elite Malay indifference to the fate of the masses.

These memoirs describe Mustapha's early introduction to politics, his heightened political awareness from reading books and dailies, and his secret political meetings with radical young Malays to discuss the fate of the Malays. The story continues with the 1938 formation of the first Malay political organisation, Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM) or Young Malay Union, and his election as its Vice President. As the British disapproved of Malays getting involved in political activities, to these young radical nationalists KMM also meant Kesatuan Malaya Merdeka, or Independent Malaya Union.

Just before World War II broke out on 8 December 1941, KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub and 150 KMM members from all over Malaya

were arrested because the British suspected they would assist the invading Japanese forces. Mustapha was able to escape the British dragnet as he was then under treatment in the Malay Hospital of Kuala Lumpur. Unaware that there was a warrant of arrest for him, he left the hospital on long medical leave, returned to his work place, the School of Agriculture, collected his family and headed for his hometown Matang to recuperate.

However, a few weeks later, when he was in Matang, a Japanese Intelligence Unit (Fujiwara Kikan) under Major Fujiwara Iwaichi came looking for him as he was the most senior KMM member not in prison. Unknown to Mustapha, Ibrahim Yaakub had promised KMM's co-operation to the Japanese invaders. Many other KMM members, like Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako), Ahmad Boestamam, Idris Hakim and M.N. Othman, were also unaware of the secret pact.

Without his family's knowledge, Mustapha was taken away by the Japanese with just the clothes on his back. From Matang, he was taken to Taiping, then Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, and finally, Singapore, where he and some KMM members witnessed the 'fall of Singapore' on 15 February 1942. Accompanying the Japanese forces changed the course of his life. He and many Malay youths (both KMM and non-KMM members) 'moved' down the peninsula with the Japanese. His vivid first-hand accounts provide the first detailed narrative of the so-called Malay fifth columnist involvement in the war.

While the war raged in January 1942, Mustapha led a KMM delegation in Kuala Lumpur to ask Japanese commanders to declare Malaya's independence. Thus, he was the first Malay to ask for independence for his homeland, as confirmed on page 103 of Dr Cheah Boon Kheng's book *Red Star over Malaya*.

In fact, in January 1942, after the Japanese forces had entered Kuala Lumpur, a conflict of aims had arisen when Mustapha Hussain asked the Japanese commanders to back a proclamation of Malayan independence, citing Japan's promise to liberate Malaya from British rule. But the request was turned down.

Mustapha quoted the Japanese commander's symbolic answer: 'Let the Japanese be the father. Malay, Chinese and Indian be the children. However, if the Malay child is thin, we will give him more milk'.

Mustapha then used his position as a KMM leader, and his good relations with the Japanese to save, assist and free hundreds of people caught in the pandemonium of war. To begin with, while in Kuala Lumpur, he saved the lives of about ten Malay Intelligence Officers from sure death at the hands of the Japanese. These officers included the late Raja Dato' Sri Ahmed Hisham bin Raja Abdul Malik, then the highest-ranking Malay Police Officer in the colonial police force and later second in line to the

Perak throne. This has been substantiated by letters of appreciation from Raja Ahmed Hisham and his assistant, Jalaluddin Abu Bakar.

Mustapha landed in Singapore with Fujiwara Kikan two days before the fall of Singapore. There, he saved the lives of hundreds of Malay soldiers, again substantiated by many letters of appreciation. One soldier, Sgt Haji Harun Musa, was saved from a heap of dead bodies.

Mustapha helped many more soldiers by sending out word that Malay fighting men should not report to Farrer Park as ordered by the Japanese, as he feared they would become prisoners of war. Despite this effort, however several hundred Malay fighting men still went to the designated location.

He then visited Farrer Park himself, and advised Captain Raja Aman Shah (brother-in-law of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's first Prime Minister) and Lt Ariffin bin Haji Sulaiman on how to handle the new regime. He also sent food (he knew where the Japanese kept supplies) to detained Malay soldiers.

After much negotiation between KMM and the Japanese commanders, hundreds of Malay soldiers escaped death or being detained as POWs, except for six Malay officers who were killed. Although Mustapha managed to save thousands of lives during the war, the biggest regret of his life was not being able to save these six officers, including Captain Raja Aman Shah and Lt Ariffin, whom the Japanese suspected had been left behind by the British to organise resistance to the Japanese.

Mustapha also provided food and money to hundreds of soldiers and their families hiding in Istana Kampung Gelam, Singapore. He later arranged for the issue of Japanese passes to Malay soldiers and their families to enable them to return home safely on the peninsula.

Later, disillusioned with both the Japanese and Ibrahim, Mustapha returned to Matang weeks after the fall of Singapore. In 1943, he was again 'pulled up' by the Japanese, this time to go to Singapore to form a Japanese-sponsored Malay Volunteer Force, Malai Giyu Gun or Pembela Tanah Air (PETA) or Defenders of the Homeland. He soon left the Japanese administration and returned to Malaya to become a farmer in Batu 20, Perak, and provides the reader with an interesting account of village life during the Occupation.

Towards the end of the Occupation, when the Japanese were losing ground, they set up Hodoshō (Help-and-Guide People Office) and KRIS (Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa) or Special Strength of the People. Soon after, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmi (Malay Officer-in-Charge of Islam and Malay Customs under the Japanese Military Administration) pleaded with Mustapha to help with the Malay efforts to gain Malaya's independence.

Mustapha then worked secretly in a room in Taiping's St George's Institution to draw up a Malaya Merdeka Constitution (Independent Malaya Constitution) to be discussed at the KRIS Congress in Kuala Lumpur in mid-August 1945, after which Malaya would be declared independent on 17 August of that same year. Unfortunately, Malaya could not be declared independent because the Japanese surrendered just forty-eight hours before the proclamation date. Consequently, the British ruled Malaya for another twelve years!

Contrary to Ibrahim's claims, Mustapha, who had worked on the Malaya Merdeka Constitution, maintained that Malayan independence was not to be part of *Indonesia Raya* (Greater Indonesia). Malaya was to declare its independence on the same date, but separately. Not unlike Ho Chi Minh's declaration of Vietnamese independence at around the same time, the Malaya Merdeka Constitution that Mustapha drafted was inspired by the American Declaration of Independence of 1776.

After the Japanese surrender, Mustapha was hunted by the Bintang Tiga (Three Stars) Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) led 'administration' during the three week interregnum between the Japanese surrender in Tokyo and British colonial military re-occupation, and Force 136, the British-organised anti-Japanese guerrilla force. He then went to see Lt Col Peter G. Dobree, Force 136's commander, to explain his position as KMM leader. Mustapha was immediately arrested and imprisoned. The memoir contains a sad, but interesting account of Mustapha's experience as a political detainee in a British prison and two lock-ups.

He was released almost a year later in 1946, when 400 soldiers whom he had directly or indirectly saved from being killed by the Japanese in Singapore sent a petition with their signatures to the British Field Security Service Officer. This is confirmed on page 274 of Dr Cheah Boon Kheng's *Red Star over Malaya*:

Mustapha Hussain was subsequently taken into custody, but several months later after petitions were made to the British Military Administration from former members of the Malay Regiment whose lives he had saved from the Japanese, he was released.

He was unlawfully dismissed by the British from his pensionable job at the School of Agriculture in Serdang and was forbidden from participation in politics and trade unions for five years. Shortly after, however, he was again involved in the PKMM (Malay Nationalist Party or MNP) as a secret advisor to its leader, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmi. Together, they toured Malaya's West Coast and then participated in the historic PUTERA-AMCJA Conference involving the Malay Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA or Centre of the People's Forces) and the multi-ethnic

All-Malayan Council of Joint Action (AMCJA), which declared a People's Constitution for an independent Malaya in 1947, well before UMNO adopted *Merdeka* (Independence) as its slogan in 1951.

Having lost his colonial government job, Mustapha was forced to hawk food and later ran a restaurant in Pasar Minggu (Sunday Market), Kuala Lumpur. In 1951, while running the Tengah Restaurant, he was nominated to replace Datuk Onn, who had resigned as UMNO President.

A month later, Tunku Abdul Rahman's name came up. At UMNO Youth Alliance Third Annual Conference on 28 July 1951, Mustapha lost the nomination for the presidency to Tunku (later Malaysia's first Prime Minister) by one vote. For the deputy president's post, he garnered the same number of votes as his opponent, Tun Abdul Razak (later Malaysia's second Prime Minister), but the chairman, Tan Sri Haji Mohd Noah bin Omar gave his casting vote to Tun Abdul Razak, his prospective son-in-law. Mustapha was nominated the sole vice president, but did not accept.

In 1954, he was nominated by UMNO Perak to take over Tun Dr Ismail's position when the latter was named Malaya's Ambassador to the US. The nomination was blocked, however, when UMNO introduced a rule requiring five years' membership to qualify. Nevertheless, Mustapha continued to be active in UMNO Larut and Matang, campaigning for the Alliance and was elected a Taiping Municipal Councillor.

One obvious theme running through the volume is the pronounced difference in motivation between Mustapha and Ibrahim. Mustapha questions some claims in books written by Ibrahim after fleeing to Indonesia in 1945. His story also involved much personal suffering. His family suffered considerably, especially his wife, Mariah, who stood by him with patience and faith in his nationalist struggle. He also lost two brothers, Alli and Yahaya, to the MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army).

This book not only provides an unusual political account of pre-war and pre-independent Malaya, but also offers social commentary on life and the Malay thinking in colonial Malaya from the 1920s onwards. Mustapha's observations are detailed, colourful, fascinating and sometimes amusing. It also provides interesting personal insights on personalities like Ibrahim, Pak Sako, Ahmad Boestamam, Abdul Kadir Adabi, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmi and Japanese Occupation Officers. For Mustapha, the truth must be told.

While accompanying F Kikan at the height of war, Mustapha saw enough horror to last a lifetime. He saw blood gush out and flow lazily, heads roll in the dirt and on spikes at road junctions, men shot in the air and in ground attacks as well as bodies bloated with maggots. Until his

passing, he could not erase such gruesome, brutal and bloodcurdling scenes from his memory.

One night three months before he died, in delirium while having a high fever, he struggled as if in a wild frenzy, flapping like a turtle turned upside down, as my mother tried to pin him down. I tried to take over from my exhausted mother, but he was so strong despite his age that he threw me off the bed. It was some minutes before my sister Hendun and my mother could restrain him together.

Mother had seen that happen before. Father's nightmares were always full of gruesome flashbacks of the war in Singapore. That night, he was reliving an episode when he shouted, at the top of his voice, to stop a hysterical Japanese sergeant from executing Malay soldiers already strapped to rubber trees. The full story will follow. Indeed, for my father, the past lived on until he found peace with his last breath.

Glossary

- alir* – floating board with chicken intestines attached to a giant hook for catching crocodiles
- almeira* – large cupboard (Portuguese)
- AMCJA* – All-Malaya Council of Joint Action
- anchak* – contraption used to ‘feed’ ghosts and spirits
- anghun* – a red-pigmented Chinese tobacco (Chinese)
- ari-ari* – leaves when soaked in water excellent for cleaning slate boards
- arigato* – thank you (Japanese)
- atap* – thatch roofing material from *nipah* palm leaves
- awai* – traditional musical instrument
- ayam hutan* – jungle fowl
- bajang* – evil spirit with long nails which haunts pregnant women and infants
- baju teluk belanga* – traditional Malay tunic for males
- bandot tua makan lalap muda* – an old goat feeding on young shoots
- bangsa* – nation (often now used to refer to ‘race’)
- bangsawan* – Malay opera
- banzai* – cheers of jubilation (Japanese)
- bapa* – father or a respected elder
- batik lepas* – long pieces of *batik* cloth wound around the body
- beduk* – large traditional drum
- belanja hangus* – dowry from bridegroom to bride for wedding expenses
- belanja tubuh* – gift for the bride
- benzin* – petrol (Indonesian)
- berangan* – local chestnut
- berani kerana benar* – righteously bold
- bertam* – type of palm
- blitzkrieg* – lightning attack (German)
- bomoh* – Malay shaman
- boria* – Malay choir
- boshi* – Japanese cap with piece of cloth hanging at the back (Japanese)
- bubur gandum* – wheat porridge
- bubur kacang* – green bean porridge
- bunga melor* – jasmine flower

- burung murai* – blabber bird
changkul – draw-hoe
chapel – Malay sandals, though the word is Indian in origin
chapati – Punjabi pancake
chempaka – tree/flower *michelia champaca*
cheroot – tightly-rolled cigar made of tobacco leaves
chettiar – Tamil Indian moneylender
chikgu – teacher
chiku – a dark brown fruit
chongkak – Malay game played with two rows of holes and cowries
chuchuk mata anak seluang – spiritually blinded
chupak – volume measure for rice; a quarter of a *gantang*
daching – weighing scales with a graduated rod, a pan and a weight
dhal – Indian lentils
dokak – upright abacus with white, green, yellow, black and red beads
dosai – South Indian rice flour pancake
dhoti – South Indian wrap around male white cloth garment (Tamil)
durian – Southeast Asian fruit with thick thorny skin and pungent pulpy flesh
Enchik – Mister
F Kikan – Fujiwara Kikan, a unit of Japanese military intelligence named after its commanding office, Major Fujiwara Iwaichi (Japanese)
fardu kifayah – Muslim social obligation
gado-gado – vegetable salad in a spicy peanut sauce
gaduh-gaduh – to quarrel
gambier – condiment made with *gambier* tree leaves
gantang – Malay gallon (volume measure for rice); four *chupak* usually weighing six *kati* (eight pounds) of rice;
gendang – double-leaded barrel-drums
haj – Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca during pilgrimage season
haji – a Muslim man who has performed the *haj* pilgrimage
hajah – a Muslim woman who has performed the *haj* pilgrimage
halwa mental – mental delicacies
hartal – general strike (Hindi)
ibu sawan – sores on the scalp
ikhwan – brother, brotherhood (Arabic)
ilmu kancing mulut anjing – chants to lock the jaws of dogs: useful for walking to school
ilmu menawar bisa – chants to reduce the irritation of insect stings
ilmu menolong orang chekik tulang – chants to help someone choking on a bone

- ilmu pengasih* – chants to seduce a woman
ilmu penunduk – chants to subjugate others
imam – Muslim leader, usually for prayers
Israk Mikraj – ascension of Prophet Mohammed
jeruju – small fruit of a thorny bush growing in tidal areas
jika tiada senapang lebih baik beri jalan lapang – if one has no guns, it is best to give way
jin tanah – earth spirit
jin – spirit
kaki – foot, leg
kaku – village game using tiles
kampung – village
kangkong – watercress, a leafy green vegetable
kapok – cotton-like substance from a tree
kakka – boss or chief (Japanese)
kati – one and one-third pound
kavadi – Hindu sacrificial burden (Tamil)
kayu tiga – literally, three sticks, but implying a trick/fraud
kebaya – loose Kedah-cut tunic or figure-hugging blouse
keduduk – Indian rhododendron
kemenyan – benzoin aromatic resin from a tree
kemuning – tree/flower *merrilia caloxylon*
kepul – unit for rice, slightly more than a condensed milk can
keramat – spiritually protected
keris – wavy Malay dagger
kerja kayu – working in mangrove swamps
kerja laut – working at sea, e.g. fishermen
ketuanan – dominance (root word *tuan*)
ketupat – rice cooked in small woven coconut-leaf basket
kibas – type of sheep found in Arabia
kurrah – come quickly (Japanese)
laksa asam – thick rice-flour noodles in a sour fish gravy
lalang – long coarse grass
lanchang – tiny boat floated down river to feed ‘The Water Ghost’
lekar – woven rattan pot-stand
maghrib – Muslim prayer at dusk
makyong – a performance of romantic drama, dance, operatic singing and broad comedy, usually from the north-eastern state of Kelantan, with a cast of attractive young women and a few men
mandore – overseer
Melayu – Malay

mengkuang – screw-pine leaves

merbau – ironwood

merdeka – free, independent

minyak atar – perfume usually from Saudi Arabia, popular among Muslims

Mohd – abbreviation for Mohammad, Mohammed, Mohamad or Muhammad

MPAJA – the communist-led Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army

minyak chelak – a coconut oil mixture used to drive away evil spirits

nai – no (Japanese)

nakhoda – seafaring merchant vessel captain

nasi kandar – rice historically sold by vendors carrying food on long shoulder poles

nasi lemak – rice cooked in coconut milk

nipah – type of palm

nusa dan bangsa – country and nation (people)

Orang Asli – aboriginal, indigenous individual, community or ethnic groups

orang bunian – gnome, not necessarily evil, living and playing in the jungle

orang kebun – plantation people

orang putih – white person

padang – field

pandan – pandanus plant with fragrant leaves

pantun – Malay quatrain

pelesit – spirit in the form of a vampire cricket

penghulu – village/county leader

petai – pungent, but delicious green jungle bean

pikul – 130 pounds

pontianak – beautiful long-haired female vampire enticing men

potu – Hindu mark at centre of forehead (Tamil)

pulaikat – checked cotton cloth usually for male sarong wrap-around from waist to ankle originally made in South India and exported from the port with the same name.

pulut kuning – yellow-coloured glutinous rice

PUTERA – Pusat Tenaga Rakyat, or Centre of People’s Power

rambai – a sweet-sour fruit growing in clusters

rambutan – fruit with hairy skin and delicious pearly white flesh

rebab – spike fiddle

rebana – drum with parchment stretched on only one side

rehal – foldable wooden bases usually for holding Qur’an

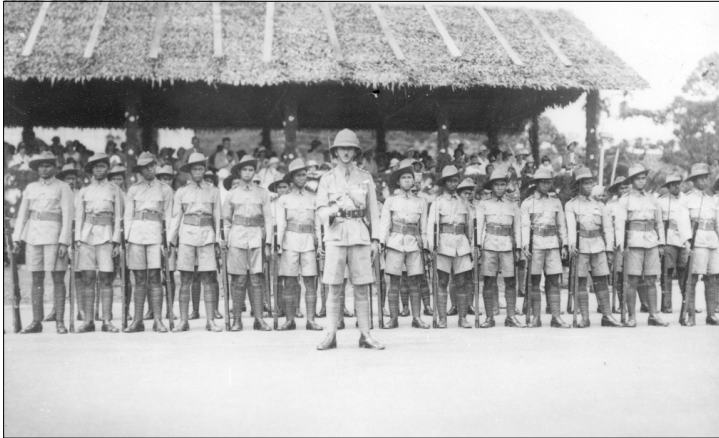
rendang ayam – seasoned chicken cooked in coconut milk until dry

rimau – tiger

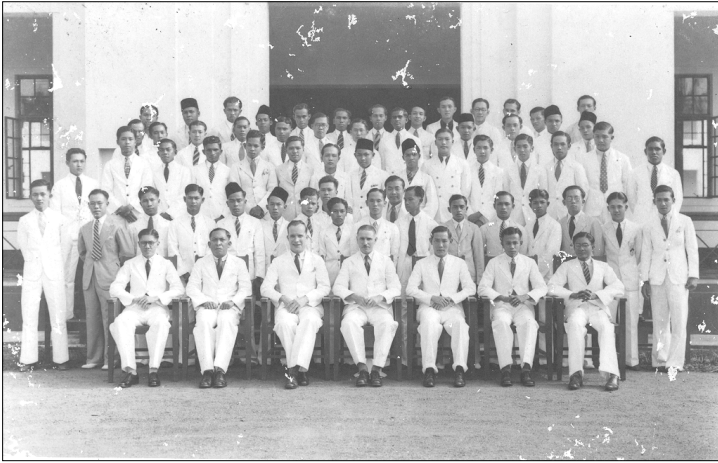
- rojak* – mixed sliced vegetables and fruits seasoned with a spicy sauce
rokok daun – Malay tobacco cigarette wrapped in dried *nipah* palm shoot
roti kahwin – thick Hailam egg-custard sandwich
rumah hantu – haunted house
samarinda sarong – wrap around ankle-length waist garment from Celebes
sampan – small rowing boat
samping – traditional cloth wrapped around the waist up to knee level, worn by males
sarong – wraparound cloth
satay – grilled skewered meat
s.a.w. – Peace Be Upon Him (salutation reserved for Prophet Mohammed)
sawi – spinach mustard vegetable
selendang – long shawl worn over the shoulders, round the neck or over the head
semota – a kind of headgear worn by Malays living on the East Coast of Malaya
sepak raga – kickball game using a woven rattan ball
sesumpah – small long-tongued chameleon
silat – Malay martial art
sotong bakar – grilled dried squid
songkok – Malay velvet headgear
stengah – originally half whiskey and half soda drink
suap – hand feed
syair – story related in verse form using quatrains of a rhyme
tanah – land
Tanah Melayu – (The) Malay Land
tawak-tawak – deep-rimmed hanging gongs
teh tarik – tea cooled by pouring between two hand-held containers
tepas – split and woven bamboo
towkay – a merchant, businessman or boss (Chinese)
toddy – intoxicating fermented juice from coconut palm
tuan – sir, usually reserved for whites during the colonial period (Malay)
turmeric – a type of rhizome used as a yellow colouring substance or for flavouring
udang kena bakar – grilled prawn
unchui – a Chinese water pipe (Hokkien)
upeh – large dried and curved areca tree flower-sheath which looks like a miniature canoe
ustaz – male religious teacher
yoroshi – good (Japanese)



1928 – Mustapha with his Malay Apprentice course mates at the School of Agriculture, then in Kuala Lumpur. He is seated at the extreme right of the second row holding a hat to his chest.



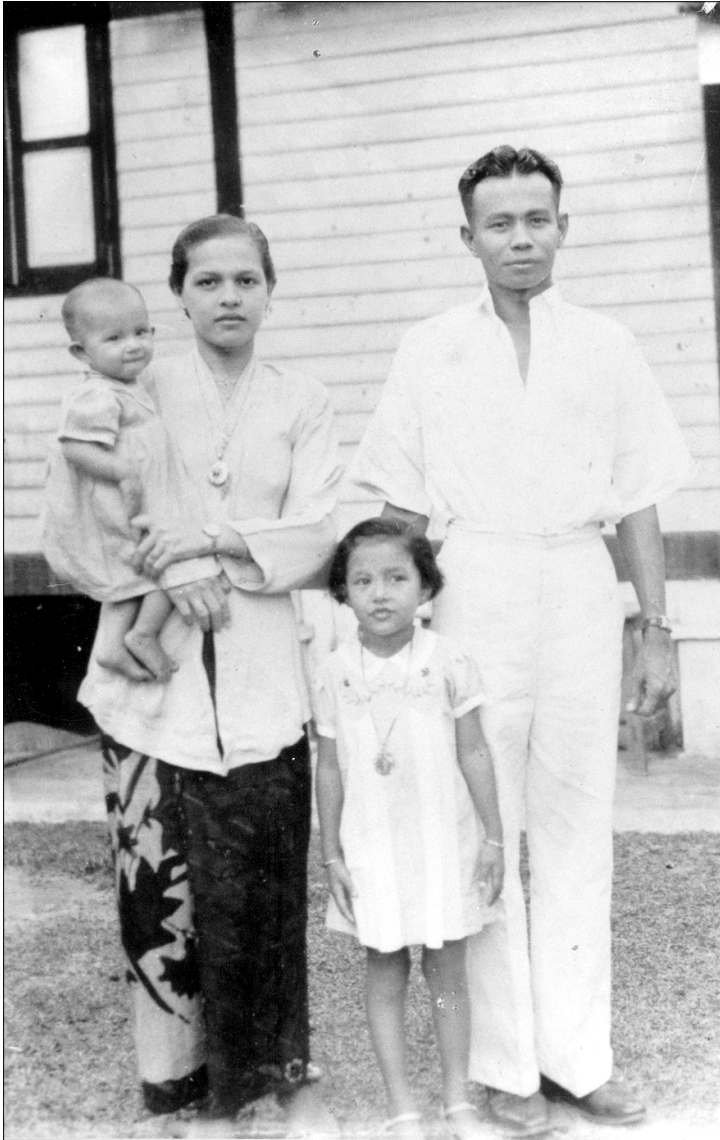
Circa 1930 – Malay Apprentices of the School of Agriculture taking part in a Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF) drill led by School Principal, G.E. Mann.



Circa 1939 – Students and teaching staff of the School of Agriculture, then in Serdang. Mustapha is seated second from right.



1938 – Mustapha, his wife Mariah binti Haji Abdul Hamid (formerly Dorothy Ida Fenner) and their first daughter Ayesha taken in Morib, Selangor.



1940 – Mustapha, his wife Mariah and daughters Ayesha and Hendun, while he was active in the KMM.



1942 – Mustapha's older brother Alli (left) and younger brother Yahaya in Taiping soon after the latter's release from a Singapore prison. The British had imprisoned him for being a KMM member.



Circa 1955 – Standing between Mustapha and his wife Mariah is daughter Insun and sons Roslan Bayu, Adlan and Adelain. Taken at the Penang Botanic Gardens.



1953 – Mustapha and his father, Haji Hussam bin Haji Aminuddin, taken after Mustapha won in the Taiping Town Council elections.



1989 – Sergeant Haji Harun bin Haji Musa, whom Mustapha saved from a heap of dead bodies soon after the fall of Singapore. His battle scars were still clear after 47 years.



Circa 1954 – Founder members of UMNO Larut and Matang with Tunku Abdul Rahman (1, later Malaya's first Prime Minister) and Ghazali Jawi (2, later Chief Minister of Perak). 3 is Mustapha.



1960s – Mustapha and an insurance agent friend, probably Mohd Mustafa bin Ali, the young Malay who moved with F Kikan from Ipoh to Singapore.



1980s – Mustapha with Malay nationalists and historians at a seminar. He is fifth from left while his wife Mariah is fourth from left. Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) is sixth from right.



1982 – Forty years after Mustapha Hussain saved the lives of hundreds of soldiers and civilians during the Japanese Occupation, his deeds were recognised. The late Sultan of Perak, Sultan Idris Shah is seen here awarding Mustapha a Perak state honour, the Ahli Mahkota Perak (AMP).



1985 – Mustapha, ever cheerful, clean-shaven and well groomed, always wore a coat with pockets full of asthma medicine and an inhaler, with wife Mariah two years before he died.

My Family: At the Dawn of the Twentieth Century

In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate and the Most Merciful, I begin this memoir in January 1976 at my home at No. 11, Jalan Menteri, Matang, Perak. I am now 66 years old.

I was born in Matang at dusk on 21 August 1910, when Muslims in the nearby mosque were busy celebrating the auspicious *Israk Mikraj* (ascension of Prophet Mohammed *s.a.w.* to heaven). The mosque was actually a British sop to placate the Matang Malays who had been infuriated by the hanging of five Malay and Orang Asli (aboriginal) patriots. These patriots, including Datuk Sagor, Datuk Sri Maharajalela, Si Putum and Datuk Panglima Endut, had been accused of complicity in the murder of Perak's first British Resident, J.W.W. Birch, in Pasir Salak in September 1875.

My late grandfather, Haji Aminuddin bin Haji Abdul Kadir, was a *penghulu* (village or county headman) in Sungai Tinggi, Perak. According to our family tree, we are descended from Sultan Alam Shah of the Pagaruyung Sultanate in West Sumatra, but the family later moved to Batu Bara, North Sumatra. There, they became community leaders and excelled as traders with their own vessels. Most were thus titled Nakhoda or 'trader captain'.

In the 1840s, my great grandfather Haji Abdul Kadir bin Kaul (better known as Nakhoda Sulong or Nakhoda Ulong) migrated to Malaya with his family. I don't know their reasons, but thankfully, my ancestors did away with their high titles after settling down in Matang.

My late father Hussain was the older brother of Aishahtun, mother of the late Tun Yusof Ishak, the first President of Singapore, and his brother, Aziz Ishak, former Minister of Agriculture for Malaya. Both are therefore my cousins.

I am fourth in a family of ten children, three girls and seven boys, many of whom are politically motivated. My older brother Alli was the first Secretary of the Persatuan Melayu Perak (Perak Malay Association), while my brother Yahaya participated actively in the Pahang State Branch

of Malaya's first political party, Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), or Young Malay Union. I myself was KMM's first Vice President from 1938 until 1942.

My father, a land demarcator with the British Colonial Government, spent many years learning English on his own until he gained an impressive command of the language. I salute him for being one of the progressive Malays of his time, to have visualised the importance of English, not only as a medium for learning, but as a language of progress. As his children, we benefited immeasurably from his early awareness.

My mother Saadiah binti Mohd Itam, though traditional, was a special woman of her time. She handled all ten of us, mostly boys, exceptionally well every time our father went on his surveying expeditions, which could take weeks. Broad-minded and thrifty, she always urged us, her children, to be 'of one heart'. Although most parents of that time intervened in their sons' lives, including choosing their brides, my mother gave us free rein.

At a time when most *kampung* (village) folks, especially Islamic religious teachers, considered English the 'language of hell', my parents rejected this view. The *kampung*'s belief stemmed from the experience of a young man from Jebong, two miles from our home, who, instead of reciting Islamic holy verses on his deathbed, had rambled wildly in English. The villagers assumed he had been affected by Christian holy water when the poor soul was actually delirious with high fever. Following the incident, many Malay pupils were pulled out of English schools by alarmed parents. A teacher friend, Jamil bin Abdul Rahman, never quite forgot that he was a hapless victim of the 'language of hell' campaign.

Several years later, when fear of the campaign had subsided, another religious figure went around the village condemning parents who had children in English schools, cadet corps and athletic teams. "Only education to prepare oneself for the next life is important", he preached. He brought fear to the hearts of many when he campaigned that a Muslim who touched or walked under the shadow of the statue of either the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ would automatically become infidels.

Fortunately, the English school I attended, the King Edward VII School in Taiping, had no such statues. No Malay students attended the neighbouring St George's Institution as it was run by white priests in black robes. The poor victims of his preaching were a handful of Malay girls who attended the Taiping Convent School, where a statue of the Virgin Mary holding a cross stood in its front yard. The girls were pulled out of school en masse. How they suffered! The one girl who remained, Don from Trong, became the first Malay nurse in the Larut and Matang District.

It was not that my father took Islam lightly, but he often asked, "Is

Islam not in pursuit of progress?” He stuck to his beliefs, and we continued to attend English school. However, I must add that not all religious leaders were barriers to progress.

My father liked to experiment, as he cared about bringing knowledge and progress to the Malay community. One such experiment was his sending Malay newspapers from our home to the mosque, encouraging villagers to read them in between prayers, rather than just making small talk. For this action he was branded a ‘Satan’.

Despite his controversial ideas, my father was as devout a Muslim as any. He prayed the requisite five times a day, fasted throughout the month of Ramadan, donated to many religious and charitable causes, and had performed the *haj* three times, even though once was sufficient. Perhaps Malay newspapers had some influence on his thinking. While we were still young, he forced us to read these periodicals so as to follow current events and widen our horizons. I am proud to have had such a father, in contrast to my friends’ parents.

I often heard the Convent School termed an *arpang* school when *arpang* meant nothing in Malay. Much later in life, I found out that *arpang* came from the English word ‘orphan’ as most convents housed orphans.

Years later, when government and private sector jobs were mainly filled by non-Malays, religious teachers suddenly stopped their campaigns. In fact, they openly encouraged their own children to go for higher education. When questioned what had happened to the old ‘language of hell’ sermons, they were quick to reply that past religious teachers were not precise in translating Islamic teachings. After all, Prophet Mohammed *s.a.w.* himself had urged Muslims, “Go in search of knowledge, even to China.” Where was this advice when I was growing up?

My diligent father earned a regular salary, but with the help of a rubber smallholding and my mother’s *kampung*-style economy, we lived very well. The *kampung* folk and the Chinese shopkeepers called us *anak tok kerani* or ‘master clerk’s son’, and gave us special treatment and attention. Despite these blessings, our wise father taught us to be enterprising and resourceful. For a small fee, we were asked to weed our rubber smallholding, to tap rubber and to look for weeds and grass for our chickens, ducks and goats. Sometimes, Father paid us by weight, so we looked for weeds and grass that grew near drains, for they were thicker and heavier when wet.

Before the arrival of cars in Matang, my father bought a buggy, pulled by an enormous horse and steered by an Indian syce. Soon after, another buggy was seen in Matang, belonging to Mr Alexander Keir, the Principal of the Matang Malay Teachers’ College. He was later appointed Inspector of Schools for the state of Perak.

When the price of rubber plummeted and more of his children were attending school, my father's financial situation weakened, but I never once heard him complain. He went to and from work in mended and re-mended clothes. From smoking 'Capstan' or 'White Tin' cigarettes, he switched to the cheaper 'Double Eagle' or 'Bird Cigarette' brands.

When I sought his permission to join a private tuition class, he readily gave me \$10 per month, saying softly, "Yes, do join the class. I will look for the money, don't you worry." The amount then could support a whole family for an entire month. I felt grateful because my friends who could not afford private tuition were often caned for not being 'clever enough'. One pupil bled when a teacher, shouting "Sa Pristi, young rascal", caned him with all the strength he could muster. That was my earliest awareness of an effect of poverty on the Malays.

What did we gain from private tuition? This teacher collected us in his house and then instructed us to copy a picture hanging on the wall, of a drowning boy being saved by a winged Christian angel. Soon after he told us to go home. Two days later, he conducted a sketching test, asking all his pupils to draw the same picture. Naturally, those of us who had attended his private tuition fared well. The others, who could not afford ten dollars a month, were caned.

When the Japanese invaded Malaya in December 1941, as Vice President of KMM or the Young Malay Union (the first Malay political party in Malaya), I was 'taken' to move with them from Taiping to Singapore, where the British surrendered on 15 February 1942.

Yet, like most families, my family did not escape the war's aftermath and hardships. To avoid undesirable incidents, my wife and three children hid in the jungle across the Larut River behind my father's house. Carrying our three-month-old baby in her arms with two other children tugging on her sarong, she camped in the jungle for many weeks. There, our baby slept in a cradle made by tying an old sarong to a tree branch. When the situation improved, they only hid from dawn to dusk.

As the Japanese had taken me away with just the clothes on my back, I was not able to leave any 'Japanese amulet' (a special Japanese-stamped letter), which could guarantee safety to the bearer and his property.

One day, a team of Japanese soldiers came to commandeer my car from under my father's house. My brother Osman tried to explain that I had been 'taken' to Singapore by Japanese officers, but they refused to listen, pointing a bayonet at Osman instead. My car was towed away on the pretext of being repaired. We never saw it again.

On another occasion, the Japanese came to commandeer my brother Alli's car. Osman told them that Alli had taken the keys, but he was threatened again, this time with a sword. My ailing mother fainted from

the stress. When she regained consciousness, she asked Osman to look for Alli to get the keys. When Alli returned with a 'Japanese amulet' he carried as Deputy State Forest Officer for Perak, the Japanese left his car alone.

Fear and worrying about my family always having to hide in the jungle aggravated my mother's health. She died four months later in April 1942 at 57. Alli and Yahaya, two of my brothers, also lost their lives during the Japanese Occupation.

In 1937, Alli, a Senior Cambridge certificate holder, was the first Secretary to the Perak Malay Association while Wan Mohd Nor bin Wan Nasir was President. The British, who suspected that the association was hostile to them and also anti-feudal, decided to weaken it by transferring Alli to Rompin in Pahang, and Wan Mohd Nor to Tanjung Malim in Perak. Laidin, the Treasurer, was likewise moved to Kuala Lumpur. This was before the association was taken over by Datuk Panglima Bukit Gantang, Abdul Wahab bin Toh Muda Abdul Aziz.

Before the Japanese Invasion, Alli had been an Assistant Forest Officer in Perak, but during the Japanese Occupation, he was appointed Deputy State Forest Officer for Perak. In July 1944, he was abducted by the communist-led Malayan People's Anti Japanese Army (MPAJA) in Tanjung Tualang, Perak, and was believed to have been killed later. His assistant, however, was released after a beating.

My younger brother, Yahaya, a Senior Cambridge certificate holder as well as an Agriculture School Diploma holder, was working as an Agricultural Assistant in Jerantut, Pahang before the Japanese invasion. He was, in fact, the prime mover for KMM's state branch in that part of the country.

In early December 1941, days before the invasion, Yahaya, together with many others, was arrested by the British for being a KMM member. He was first taken from Jerantut to Pudu Prison in Kuala Lumpur before being transferred to Changi Prison in Singapore.

A couple of days before the British surrendered on 15 February 1942, Yahaya was released, together with other prisoners including other jailed KMM members. I stumbled upon him a few days later at the Bukit Chermin Siamese Temple in Singapore, but could hardly recognise him. He had not shaved in over two months and was plastered with mud from Japanese shelling.

During the Occupation, Yahaya was appointed Chief of Derris Tuba Experimental Farm in Som, Jerantut, Pahang. Towards the end of the war, Yahaya was killed by MPAJA guerrillas. His pregnant wife, who had cried out "If you kill him, you might as well kill me", was also killed. *Kampung* folks buried the couple in an unmarked grave in Damak, Pahang.

Matang in the Folds of History

At the turn of the twentieth century, Matang was a bustling town, with the winning advantage of being located exactly midway between Taiping, the ‘town that tin built’, and the swampy fishing town of Port Weld (now Kuala Sepetang). Port Weld was both a busy port and a smuggling haven for many well-tanned Chinese. Matang also lay along Malaya’s first railway track, constructed in 1885, which ran straight as a pole between Taiping and Port Weld.

Today’s laid-back, slumberous town of Matang barely reflects its past glory and legacy. Early Matang was energetic and lively because it was there, and not in Taiping, that the major British government offices were located. This included the District Police Station, the District and Land Offices, and the first Malay Teachers’ College, established in 1913. The college moved to Tanjung Malim in 1922 and renamed the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC).¹

Apart from that, many thought-provoking and historic events happened in Matang. My memoir would be incomplete without an account of Matang in the fold of the nation’s history and its impact on me.

Matang came into historical prominence after the 1875 assassination of Malaya’s first British Resident, J.W.W. Birch in Pasir Salak, Perak. Consequently, five patriots, including Datuk Sri Maharajalela and Datuk Sagor were brought to Matang in 1877 to be hanged by the colonial masters, only 33 years before I was born. The cold-blooded execution of these Malays allegedly involved in the conspiracy was conducted near two mango trees only three hundred yards down the street from our family home on Jalan Menteri.

Not surprisingly, many of my brothers and I became nationalist stalwarts who completely revered undiluted Malay patriotism and courage. Our hometown environment, with its deep historical significance, representing Malay valour and gutsy defiance, moulded us to be what we are.

Even as children, we were exposed to heart-wrenching stories of early Malay struggles against British colonialists. The pathetic living conditions of Malays around my home stirred me to ask: “Why do Malays have to live in deprivation while their motherland is literally overflowing with natural resources?” As the Malay saying goes, “How come chickens in a rice store are starving, and ducks dying of thirst in the water?” What does the future hold for these gentle, refined and cultured Malays?

In 1875, the British introduced in Perak an administrative system called the Residential system. The first Resident, J.W.W. Birch, was only supposed to advise Malay Rulers. Allegedly set up to benefit the Malay rulers, the Residential system proved otherwise in practice.

An impatient man, and lacking refined manners, Birch was incapable of living harmoniously with the Perak Malay chiefs. He was flagrantly out of line when he criticised Sultan Abdullah in public. After serving in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) for 24 years, he could not, or did not, want to understand that the Malays were completely different from the group of people he had administered before. Did he not know that the Malays were known as ‘the gentlemen of the East’?

Birch made many blunders and flouted many Malay customs and traditions, infuriating almost all rulers and chiefs, except for Raja Yusoff. Matters got worse when he was ordered by the Straits Settlements Governor to move the sacred Perak state regalia to England.

One fateful day, while Birch was taking a bath on the Perak River, Si Putum sneaked into the water underneath his bathing platform to end Birch’s life with a spear. This happened despite the Indian sepoy guards guarding Birch at all times. Birch’s Malay clerk, Mat Arshad, was also killed while he was posting British notices on trees. As a consequence, Malays living along the river were summarily punished; their homes were burnt to cinders and wives and daughters raped by sepoy soldiers.

Birch’s assassination shocked the British Government, who thought it a mark of an early uprising of Malay nationalists. Reinforcements were called in from India and Hong Kong, but this incident, known as the First Perak War, remained a small, localised incident.

The five courageous Malay patriots accused of complicity were brought to Matang and imprisoned in the Malay-style high-walled Ngah Ibrahim Fort until the day of the hangings. Sultan Abdullah was exiled to the Seychelles and Raja Ismail to Johore. On the other hand, Raja Yusoff’s dreams came true when he was installed Sultan of Perak.

The hanging took place between the now closed-down Matang Post Office and the house of the Public Works Department (PWD) Superintendent, just opposite Matang’s football field, where my brothers and I

had many roaring soccer matches. According to Matang elders, the hangings were done from an inverted L-shaped wooden frame with attached pulleys to raise and lower the rope.

According to Jupita, a Matang resident who was a boy at the time, when Datuk Sagor was first hanged, he wrestled vigorously with the rope and shouted obscenities at Raja Yusoff. His struggles got the rope undone, and he was still alive when he was brought down. The British were dumbfounded, not knowing what to do, until a Malay traitor revealed a secret way to end Datuk Sagor's life. A nail soaked in lard was nailed to the top of Datuk Sagor's head before he was hung again. It was illegal for the British to hang a person twice; the man should have been freed. So much for the British rule of law.

Datuk Sagor's still body, covered with warm patriotic blood, was cleansed at the Matang Mosque according to proper Muslim rites, but was not allowed to be buried in the mosque's cemetery. So, the body of a great Malay warrior now lies in a grave across the Larut River, away from the bodies of other Malays and Muslims in the mosque's yard. His final resting place lies five yards from that of Panglima Endut, another Malay fighter.

A Matang resident, Mohd Nor bin Shamsuddin, who heard the story of the hanging from his grandfather Tok Daim, told us some Matang folk believed that Datuk Sagor's body was cut in two and buried on each side of the river. It was believed that the body would reunite if the two parts were to be buried on one bank. I have also heard stories that Datuk Sagor did not die until acid was poured on him. Others say that even though his grave is in Matang, no one knows where he was actually buried.

To placate the deeply wounded and angry Matang Malays, the British Government built a brick mosque to replace the dilapidated wooden one. It was accorded special privileges, including yearly funds for its upkeep and free water supply. There are only three mosques in Perak with such special privileges. This explains why some Matang folk call their mosque a 'political mosque'.

There were whispers that the British regretted hanging Datuk Sagor as he had not been implicated in the assassination. He had gone to Pasir Salak, the murder scene, only to receive a letter that agreed to the betrothal of two Hilir Perak chiefs' children.

Birch's grave is in Kampung Pisang, Bandar Lama Kampung Gajah, Perak. His body was said to have been found floating at this spot, a place where Indian sepoy troops would be camped three days later. Although his tombstone is time-worn, it serves as a silent reminder of Malay struggles against the British.

I remember reading a press clipping on the Birch assassination. Kampung Pisang resident Pak Mat Abdul Rawi had heard – from his grandfather – stories significantly different from those written in history books. This is why we should take history books written by the colonialists with a pinch of salt.

According to Pak Mat Abdul Rawi, Birch was killed because of his harsh ways. The Malays had also been infuriated because British Government troops had raped their women and Birch himself kept Malay women in his home. These stories make us question the writings of Western historians on Malaya.

The valour shown by these Malay warriors left an indelible impact not only on me, but also on many other Malays. In 1947, when I was 37 years old and actively fighting for *Merdeka* (Independence) through the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP), I attended a gathering held in a house in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. The host was a young civil servant from Teluk Anson (now Teluk Intan), Perak. We held clandestine meetings like this in different homes to avoid British surveillance of Malay political parties.

We met to discuss Independence and efforts to liberate Malaya from British rule. I expounded on the history of Malay struggles against British colonialists, on how Malays, decades before our time, had fought bravely with what little they had, with full knowledge that the British were armed to their teeth. Furthermore, the British Government was in a position to summon troops stationed in India and Hong Kong.

“For the love of our homeland, poor Malays before our time were willing to fight the mighty British with just a *keris* (wavy Malay dagger) or their bare hands!” I spiritedly told the small gathering. After a short pause, I continued, “For example, Datuk Sagor and Datuk Sri Maharajalela in Perak; Mat Kilau, Mat Gajah and Datuk Bahaman in Pahang.”

The audience fell into an absolute silence, deeply moved. Suddenly, the young host got up, grabbed a framed picture from the wall of his house and bashed it on the floor with unbridled fury, loudly shouting, “This is a photo of my grandfather who collaborated with the British. See, here he is, receiving the Justice of Peace medal. For what? For collaborating?”

I was stunned. This was a spontaneous show of hatred for the colonial master. To ease the tension, I continued by explaining that our fight in the MNP was not as dangerous as those undertaken by the Malays before us. Under British scrutiny, the MNP was a party with a legitimate written constitution. We were going to fight for our Independence, not with spears and *keris*, but by constitutional means, not through bloodshed. After all, this peaceful process had been encouraged by the United Nations. I then

pointed out that it would be helpful if government servants, like the host, joined in the fight for freedom.

Before leaving the house, I apologised to the host if I had caused an uproar in his home. Instead, he thanked me profusely for “making me aware that we are still under colonial oppression and need to fight on.”

This handsome fair-skinned man, a Food Control Officer, fed me with delicious food for which I was thankful. I had lost my job due to my political activities and was often hungry. From that evening, he often visited me, bringing food for my malnourished family. I am happy that he was now fully aware of Malay politics, of colonial tactics, ploys and ruses. This young man also promised to assist the MNP in whatever way he could, to regain the sovereignty of Malaya, our beloved homeland.

Note

1. Now the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), or Sultan Idris Education University.

The Tiger Catcher and Crocodile Slayer

As the Malay saying goes, “different fields have different insects; as different pools have different fish.” So it is with the games children play. They differ from place to place and from time to time.

Father rarely stopped us brothers from having fun among ourselves, but he disliked us spending too much time playing with neighbours and friends. Too much playing, he maintained, would reduce our thirst for knowledge and suppress our drive for academic excellence. Mother was constantly reminded of this by Father.

To dissuade us from playing soccer at the Matang field, he instructed several Indian labourers to convert a plot of land at the back of our house into a mini soccer field. What he did not know was that playing soccer without shouts and cheering from spectators was not much fun. But, as our fear of him was quite real, we played mostly in that modified field with hundreds of potholes, without shouts and applause.

Father’s survey expeditions – to charter new roads that could later be carved out of the dense jungles by hardy coolies – often took weeks. During his absences, Mother took over his role, supervising seven sons not far apart in age. It was far from easy. For instance, despite a devoted aunt’s close supervision, an Indian vagabond abducted me when I was two. In their search for me, one of our neighbours fell into a disused well, creating bedlam and inciting both panic and laughter. When the abductor heard the commotion being made by my family and the neighbours looking for me, he hastily abandoned me by the roadside. After that incident, I no longer wore a gold chain and bracelet, although it was fashionable then for sons of well-to-do Malays to wear gold ornaments.

The proud Larut River that ran several hundred yards from our house was once very deep and wide, with hundreds of different kinds of fish and fresh water prawns. This river is now both narrow and shallow due to constant silting caused by *orang putih* mines upriver. Serious water pollution has depleted its many aquatic inhabitants. Recently, a dredge to deepen the river was sent in by the Government, but this vintage 1925

German-made equipment was more often than not out of order. It was heart-breaking to know that our abundant natural wealth was enriching 'others' while Malays living along these silted rivers suffered when crops and livestock were destroyed by floods.

The bridge across the Larut River, near the mosque, had been constructed and reconstructed three times. The first bridge, a wooden one, was built by Haji Musa, a Malay contractor who was once an *imam* in the Matang Mosque. Using Malay workers and local *merbau* timber, Haji Musa's bridge survived more than fifty years.

In 1922, when I was twelve, a new concrete bridge replaced the wooden one. This was constructed by Indian coolies brought in by the British from India's Malabar Coast. Malays call them Malabaris. It was interesting watching these Malabaris work on the bridge, especially during the piling process. We could hear them yell "Yelli-yelli" each time they pulled the rope that hoisted the weight to its highest point before dropping it by releasing the rope.

And when they let the rope go, they always shouted "Let go," not in Malayalam or Tamil, but in English. It was strange that their *mandores* shouted "Let go!" in English instead of Malayalam. As a result, the sounds they made were like a musical jingle along the lines of "Yelli-yelli-ho."

We spent hours engrossed in watching them work and 'sing' in their colourful sarongs while chewing betel nut rolled into leaves with lime paste. But each time we went there, we upset our mother, who was specifically instructed by Father to prohibit us from going. Father was also in the habit of returning home unscheduled, just to check on us.

After all the concrete pillars had been firmly planted, we were banned from going to the bridge. We were very closely supervised, one could say almost chained inside the house by father's threats. According to Mak Endak Mariam (an aunt who lived with our extended family), the *jin* (spirit) at the bridge site hungered for children's heads. These heads were sacrificial offerings to appease the spirits minding the bridge; otherwise the new construction would collapse and kill many workers. We were categorically warned about turbaned Sikhs who came around the houses carrying empty gunny (jute) sacks and scythes. They were said to be looking not for grass to feed their cows but for children's heads.

As for the number of heads needed, someone said this was determined by the Masonic Lodge, or *rumah hantu* (haunted house), in Taiping. A worker at the Lodge said he had seen white men sitting down at meetings wearing eerie looking black robes and face masks. After much chanting and calling on dead spirits, a skull placed on the table would speak. Such stories made us shiver with fear whenever we saw turbaned Sikhs.

The third time a bridge was constructed, not far from the original site, was by a well-to-do Chinese contractor and is still in use. The bridge near the Matang Mosque was therefore built by the three major races in the country, first the Malays, then the Indians, and finally, the Chinese.

There were many other supposed dangers lurking in corners if we did not play nearer to home. Much of Matang was still covered by virgin jungle. Once or twice, tigers were found making overnight visits to the mosque.

Life was very interesting in many ways. It was a time when sweating British magistrates were known to have been summoned out of their small, but typically British courtrooms, to shoot tigers seen roaming in nearby clearings. The magistrates thus moved from 'hearings' to 'clearings', so to speak.

Many outlying villages were periodically terrorised by tigers, though always when least expected. Not just livestock were lost, but also a fair number of human lives, with grisly telltale signs of a tiger on the prowl. Living on the fringes of verdant jungles, the Malays were quick to learn about their greatly feared feline foe. There was this interesting piece of advice circulating: "When a tiger's roar sounds quite near, it is actually far away. But when it sounds far away, watch out, it is not as far as you would like it to be!"

There were then two famous brothers in Matang, known as the 'Fearless Duo', living in a thatch-roofed hut by the banks of the Larut River. One brother was a skilful crocodile killer, while the other was an adroit tiger hunter. Needless to say, both had guts and extraordinary strength. The brothers hardly spoke, wore perpetually grim looks on their faces and chewed either tobacco or betel nut. They went about bare-footed, garbed in checked Indian *pulaukat* sarong and a Malay style cotton tunic, usually black in colour. They must have had Javanese origins as they often wore Javanese batik cloth headgear. The tiger catcher also sported a bushy handlebar moustache, that made him look nearly as fearsome as the tigers he killed.

The British paid the duo a certain number of dollars for each tiger or crocodile killed so that farmers and fishermen could go about their business with less fear in their hearts and less quivering in their knees. Except for a handful of educated, especially English-educated families, Malays of that period were familiar only with these two traditional occupations. I was lucky to have come from a more fortunate group of chieftains, captains, community leaders, *penghulus* and merchants. During his time, my father had worked for the British Government, demarcating land.

The 'Fearless Duo' were the Pied Pipers of Matang, the town my forefathers had called home since the early 1840s. With eyes full of awe, we followed the brothers whenever they appeared, especially to watch them haul their lifeless catches into the town square. The elder brother, Pak Dokeh, the crocodile expert, always carried a battered black umbrella. We found it strange that he never once opened it even when it rained cats and dogs. One day at noon, after Pak Dokeh had disappeared into the town mosque to perform his Friday prayers, my group of precocious friends and I stole a look at the 'mystery umbrella'.

To our great surprise, hidden in the umbrella was a long knife with both edges sharpened, ready for action. It was obviously the one used to slaughter many a man-eating crocodile. After exchanging hurried glances, we ran helter-skelter every which way, holding on to our sarongs, making sure not to trip on them.

On days when one of the brothers appeared in the town square with his catch, a noisy crowd would quickly gather to watch the goings-on. Hearts racing with excitement, we would run from all corners of the little town to the square. We would interrupt whatever games we were playing, even if we were winning. From our expressions, there was no mistaking the great reverence we had for the brothers' fearlessness.

When it was a crocodile, the reptile was measured from snout to tail, and Pak Dokeh was paid according to its length. But, despite the many kills he had made, Pak Dokeh went out of his way to avoid an encounter with the 'great white crocodile' sometimes spotted in the river. Many said it was not an ordinary crocodile, but a *keramat*, endowed with supernatural powers.

A Police Sergeant once told us that the skins of all the crocodiles that Pak Dokeh killed were sent to England to make wallets and purses. We could not imagine that anyone would want to use these items.

If a tiger was killed, another thrilling day lay ahead. Milling around the bloody carcass of the much-feared beast, we watched Pak Manap receive payment from the Police Sergeant, but unlike with crocodiles, the reward did not vary with the animal's length or size.

There was much speculation about what would happen to the tiger. Some said the carcass would be taken to a taxidermist to be turned into a museum piece. Others suspected that the parts of this 'King of Beasts', especially its bones, liver and private parts, would be sold to Chinese apothecaries. These traditional healers swore that certain organs of the tiger could energise and rejuvenate men, while other parts were supposed remedies for otherwise difficult-to-cure ailments. I knew a friend who wore around his neck a tiger's claw shaped like the end of Aladdin's

shoes and set in silver, supposedly to ward off evil, as he was such a sickly boy.

We often spoke excitedly, commenting on the dead tiger. We speculated on how much bigger or smaller this *rimau* (tiger) was from the previous one and on countless other details. It was perfectly all right to use the word *rimau* in the square, but not in the jungle, where we were supposed to use the more honourable title of Tok Belang ('The Revered Striped One'). Otherwise the tiger might just decide to make an appearance and look for the person who dared to call it *rimau*.

Being Malayan tigers, they were much smaller than Bengal tigers, but to our young eyes, all tigers were giants on fours. Although I was told that a Malayan tiger could grow up to nine feet in length from nose tip to tail and could weigh more than four hundred pounds, I never saw one that big, dead or alive.

Pak Manap's son, who later moved to Penang, was also skilled in tiger hunting, but it was not to be his livelihood. He only agreed to track and kill savage ones that had ravaged villages or killed the 'sons of Adam and Eve'. Anyway, by the time Pak Manap's son was an adult, most villages had developed to the extent that they no longer received surprise visits from the dreaded, sometimes beautiful, beast.

Until I turned sixteen I had only seen dead tigers. When a Russian circus came to Matang, the circus tiger was a natural crowd puller. We *kampung* boys loved to show off our courage by teasing it until it roared angrily, again and again. It was a competition to have the tiger roaring its loudest, and remained an exciting game until one day a non-captive female tiger from the nearby jungle casually sauntered into the circus compound looking for the 'gentleman' that had been calling for her. This experience confirmed what my mother had said all along – a tiger roars loudest when courting his lady.

While the circus was still in Matang, our group debated among ourselves whether we should continue with our studies, which were becoming more difficult each day, or "be adventurous and join the circus." A brighter kid quipped among us, "What can we do? We can't even walk straight on level ground. They may employ us to clean horse shit!" The entire group kept quiet upon hearing that, and our ambitions were nipped in the bud. The circus left the next day.

Growing up according to my father's tight rules, we could not play very much. So, we gained much knowledge from reading without much interruption except once, when I fell in love with a Russian circus performer. I thought about her for months afterwards. My friends teased me, saying "Don't be silly. Don't act like an owl moping for the moon."

Mother sympathised with us for having little opportunity to play, but she kept us near home so as not to upset Father. However, being wily, we still managed to slip out for a game of marbles on the road in front of the mosque. While playing, our eyes would dart up and down the length of the road. Each time a car stopped, we would look to see if it was Father's. If it was, we ran home in a real hurry, parked ourselves in our own corners and pretended to be reading. Sometimes, we made sure heaps of books were just next to us. This was my father's greatest delight, to see his sons reading and studying. For this reason, he endured weeks in leech infested jungles to earn a living surveying land.

My father had hopes for us to become doctors. At that time the British colonialists only encouraged two professions among the Malays – medicine and law. Other professions such as architecture, engineering, and accounting were unheard of and never encouraged.

He also did not allow us to eat *petai*, the pungent, but delicious green beans. When we did, we quickly munched uncooked rice, to reduce the smell on our breath.

As I got older, the Larut River was no longer forbidden. We began to enjoy a less disciplined lifestyle. Rules were relaxed, not only because we were older, but also because Tok Ngah Mat Zain often advised my father not to be so hard on us.

Tok Ngah, about ninety years old, lived in a hut built by my father on our land by the riverbank. Originally from Matang, he had escaped to Perlis in the North and later to Pattani in South Thailand. This was after Tok Ngah had collaborated with Datuk Menteri Larut (Chief of Larut) to get the Larut, Selama and Krian districts to secede from the Malay Ruler in Kuala Kangsar without British consent. He only returned to Matang when the matter was no longer high on the British Government's agenda.

His skin, creased like that of an ancient elephant, displayed ugly scars. His fingers were crinkled with stab marks. We marvelled at the tell-tale signs of bravery on this courageous old fighter. Yet, his scarred and deformed fingers were deft when playing chess with my father. His self-made chessboard was extremely thick, almost three inches high. The black pieces were carved out of charred wood, while the ivory-coloured ones were from the *kemuning* tree.

Whenever he shouted 'checkmate', his voice rose to an excited pitch. He then thumped the piece as loudly as he could. Sometimes, the sound could be heard from our kitchen at the back of the house. That went on every night. Their games were deadly serious.

He had a much younger wife from Pattani. For that, some people referred to him as a *bandot tua makan lalap muda* or 'an old goat grazing

on young shoots'. They fished, trapped fresh water prawns and reared ducks as a livelihood. The ducklings, *sampan* (small rowing boat) and fishing nets were my father's gifts to the poor couple.

I harboured dreams of becoming a skilled fisherman. After much pleading with my mother, she gained permission from my father to let me accompany Tok Ngah. She said that a strong boy like me would be helpful to old Tok Ngah in rowing the *sampan*, and it would be a new experience for me. In preparation, Tok Ngah began teaching me the basics of handling a *sampan*. First, he instructed me how to steer the *sampan* left or right; one movement was called *kabir* and the other *wet*. So, I learned to paddle, and then to *kabir* and *wet*. Next, he taught me how to slow down and steady the *sampan*, together with the necessary movements to catch fresh-water prawns using nets.

One misty dawn, taking nets, bamboo poles and fermented rice as bait, we got into the small *sampan*. As soon as I started to row, he pointed out my first mistake, which was to let my knee jut out of the *sampan*. "This will anger the crocodiles. Our knees are like mirrors to the crocodiles," he said. I quickly got my knees out of the way and began to shiver a little at the word 'crocodile'. What if a crocodile were to whip its tail at me? I could not swim! I was totally dependent on this old man! Seeing him softly chant some prayers as we left the riverbank earlier that morning was no help.

When we arrived at a point behind the Matang Police Station, I heard something splash in the river. I thought something had fallen from the eerie-looking banyan tree by the bank. I was about to open my mouth to ask when the old man whispered, "Shh... Don't say anything." A crocodile had slipped into the water after sunbathing; maybe we had frightened the reptile. Up to that point, I was proud that this old man had trusted me with the paddle, but what if the crocodile was to attack us? I pulled my knees even closer together and felt the urge to go home, but was too embarrassed to say so and pretended to be brave.

As we paddled upstream, I saw lots of rotting dead ducks floating downstream, perhaps from Chinese farms upriver. The poultry must have died of some disease, as there were so many of them. There was other smelly rubbish floating down along with the dead ducks. I felt sorry for the Larut River, for having to endure all the filth thrown in by uncaring humans.

The expedition was a challenge to me, until I saw what looked like a tree trunk floating towards our *sampan*. It was swarming with flies and maggots! A dead crocodile; its skin had been stripped for sale. My courage began to wane even more after seeing that dreadful carcass. I

was beginning to imagine that every other thing I saw floating on the water was a crocodile. Perhaps the next one would be a live one. I was truly frightened.

We stopped at one point to start catching prawns. But I was so afraid that I confused *kabir* with *wet*, steering the *sampan* in the opposite direction each time I was asked to, so that the old man almost fell into the river several times!

Later, we came to the Sungai Jebong estuary, where the water was quite placid and calm. I was just beginning to feel less troubled when I remembered a Malay proverb “let not the stillness of the water deceive you into thinking there is no crocodile.”

I felt worst when I saw an *alir*, a contraption used to catch crocodiles. The *alir* is a small floating board with chicken intestines secured to a giant hook on it. All this made me freeze with fear, and I no longer felt ashamed to ask the old man to take us home. I pointed out that we had caught enough prawns for one day, and that now that the sun was up, the prawns were probably hiding in the shade by the riverbank. I did not care if my excuses did not hold water.

I had been paddling ever so gently in this calm stretch so as not to disturb the water, which could upset Mr Crocodile. Once the old man agreed to go home, I began to paddle downstream very carefully so as not to stir the calm water. But as soon as we got beyond that place, I rowed with all my might, until the placid spot was far behind. We got home without any untoward incident, but that trip put an end to my fishing adventures, and since that day, the sea has lost a fisherman.

One night, on my way home from the shop buying some groceries, I heard a Malay man groaning, “I am like an old banana tree; with one gust of the wind, I shall fall.” I shone my oil-lamp at him and saw him getting up from a fallen position to sit cross-legged. When I shone the lamp a second time, I saw him falling down again, groaning again, “I am like an old banana tree; with one gust of the wind, I shall fall.” Then, I saw a pool of vomit, consisting of noodles and cut chilli, still intact in front of him. I ran home to tell my aunt Mariam what I saw. She responded, “That must have been a drunkard. Next time, do not go out at night!”

Apart from playing with marbles and tops, another favourite activity was going out on a *kampung* adventure with a catapult in hand. It was not a case of ‘have gun will travel’, but ‘have catapult will travel’. Father encouraged us to play *chongkak*, a Malay board game using marbles or cowries, as this game taught us to count quickly. However, we were not allowed to touch playing cards, which he claimed would cause us to gamble.

During the fasting month of *Ramadan*, before the major Muslim *Hari Raya Puasa* celebrations, we went to look for bamboo to make decorative oil-lamps. Although there were no electric lights, our house was brightly lit by dozens of these bamboo-lamps with cloth wicks. On the last night of *Ramadan*, we brothers went around our *kampung* with sparklers and firecrackers in our pockets, thrilled and proud beyond words. Not many children were so privileged. We shared the fun with our not-so-lucky friends.

No radio announced the approach of *Hari Raya Puasa*, and we never envisioned a television. The mosque's *beduk* (large traditional drum) was our communicator. It was sounded to announce every prayer time or a death in the vicinity, or to inform the villagers of the onset of the *Ramadan* month and of the Muslim festival day, or *Hari Raya*.

Sometimes, I emboldened myself to enter the Police Station, not to see a dead crocodile or tiger, but to sell mangoes to the Sikh policemen for their chutneys. I was terrified of these huge Sikhs who wore red turbans as part of their uniforms. Especially fearsome were their thick moustaches and beards, but I needed to earn extra pocket money.

On one occasion, I made my way up the Police Station steps with a lead-heavy heart. I had been hauled into the station by Dunia Singh, the Sikh policeman supervising the British Government's public roadside taps. I had allegedly been caught bathing at one of them, which was an offence. What actually happened was that Dunia Singh had come to the tap to borrow my water dipper to clean himself after going to a nearby toilet, but I had refused. So, angry Dunia Singh hauled me to the Police Station with my pail (made from a large kerosene tin) and water dipper (a used condensed milk can with a long wooden handle). That was the first time I saw a lock-up, with its wooden bars and giant padlocks.

Fortunately, my Qur'an teacher Haji Mohd Ali bailed me out, but later on, I had to appear in a Taiping court. Someone advised me not to plead guilty and say I had been bathing near the drain across the road and not at the tap. But on the actual day, when the Police Sergeant asked if I was guilty, I pleaded guilty for two main reasons. I took my vow "to tell the truth and nothing but the truth" very seriously, and was terrified by the mammoth Sikh Police Sergeant with his booming voice. I was fined fifty cents by Magistrate Wan Rashidi, who later became Datuk Menteri Larut (Chief of Larut).

This was my first experience with a lock-up and a court, as if to prepare me for later days in prison as a political detainee.

***Kampung* Boy: Blind Shamans and ‘Feeding’ the Ghosts**

Kampung life moulded me in countless ways. As a *kampung* boy brought up by an endless string of caring aunts and a devoted mother, I was exposed to an assortment of beliefs, taboos and superstitions, some of which I would like to record here.

I suspect that many Malay beliefs and superstitions have been concocted by crafty elders to contain youthful enthusiasm, while others have been devices to keep young children in line. It is indeed sad. A host of superstitions may have dampened youth’s verve and vigour when they were at the portals of a world waiting to be explored.

After Qur’an-reading lessons one Saturday afternoon, my younger brother Yahaya and I sneaked into our family rubber smallholding at the back of the house, to test my newly acquired machete. Feeling invincible, like the silent movie stuntman I saw a week earlier, I attacked an old tree stump. Leaping like a Malay Don Quixote – to impress my adoring brother – I sliced and split the rotten stump repeatedly.

Having ‘declared war’ on the decaying stump, I returned home with overwhelming satisfaction that my new machete was indeed ‘one mean machine’. As soon as I got home, all of a sudden, I began to feel chilly and hot intermittently. In no time, my body temperature soared. My mother Saadiah did everything she knew to tame the wild rise in my body temperature but the fever got worse. When the temperature got threateningly high, she instructed my eldest brother Ahmed to fetch Pak Yit, the village *bomoh* (Malay shaman), from his house in Tebing Tinggi, two miles away.

Ahmed returned with Pak Yit perched on the back carrier of his squeaky-clean bicycle. Pak Yit entered our house with his right foot first. This ‘right foot first’ habit, encouraged among Malays, is supposed to help one fulfil one’s mission or undertaking for the day. He then muttered a short mantra at the doorway.

With compassion in his eyes, Pak Yit looked at my skinny body, which was visibly shaking under the grey felt blanket. He then told my mother to prepare a list of items – seven freshly plucked betel leaves, seven dried areca nut chips, some *gambier* (a condiment made from *gambier* tree leaves), a daub of lime, a beeswax candle prepared from a hive already deserted by its bees, an earthen incense-burner with charcoal embers, a wide-mouthed earthen jar filled with water, some *kemenyan* (benzoin, the aromatic resin of a type of tree) and eleven cents as token.

Carefully tucking his checked sarong under his legs, Pak Yit sat down cross-legged on the *mengkuang* (screw-pine leaves) mat next to my sleeping area. Then, we slept on mattresses made of burlap cloth, filled with *kapok* (a cotton-like substance), placed directly on the floor.

Ahmed nipped into our backyard to pluck the betel leaves from a flourishing vine that twined wildly around a bamboo framework. Every Malay home had a backyard, and most backyards had betel plants alongside ginger, turmeric (a type of rhizome used as a yellow colouring substance and for flavouring), curry-leaves and *pandan* (long fragrant leaves).

Between my brothers, aunts and mother, the requisites were ready in record time. These were reverently placed in front of Pak Yit, who had already started to repeat incantations, some Arabic sounding, some in Malay, while dropping bits of *kemenyan* on top of the smouldering embers in the earthen incense-burner. The room began to smell exotic as the *kemenyan* melted with a low hissing sound on the bed of glowing charcoals.

Pak Yit then lit the beeswax candle and dropped the molten wax on to the still water in the earthen jar. The low wide-mouthed jar was sitting on a *lekar* (woven rattan pot-stand). With an earnest expression on his face, he studied the formations made by the wax droplets; these cloud-like formations would indicate the answer to my problem. After scrutinising the white molten candle-wax patterns on the water, his face grimaced, as if in pain. It was such a grim look that I held my breath. Did he not see anything in the water, or worse, did he see something terrible?

Next, he rubbed his palms vigorously together. Soon, his crinkled fingers began to tremble, followed by his sinewy hands; finally, his sweat-coated body was also trembling. He had entered another world. In his deep trance, Pak Yit asked in a quivering voice, "Why did you chop and slash our house (tree stump)? You have injured many of us. Some of my children fell down and broke their legs."

Since Pak Yit was speaking Malay with a strong Siamese accent, my mother played the role of a translator. I nodded my head in agreement,

remembering how enthusiastic I was in testing my new machete on the tree stump earlier in the day.

In a grave and serious tone, Pak Yit apologised to the enraged spirit for my misconduct, promising it would not happen again. He even pledged a willingness to compensate for the injuries suffered by the spirit's children. After that, Pak Yit was silent for a moment, as if trying to listen to a voice only he could hear. He then asked my mother for a chicken egg, and after more chanting, took the egg to a corner of our garden to 'feed' it to the *jin tanah* (earth spirit). He returned to my bedside and muttered more mantras, requesting "my health return to normal."

Before leaving the house, he handed me the seven betel leaves, now neatly folded into tiny triangular packets that held the *gambier*, lime and areca-nut chips. These were to be chewed three times a day. As I was still young, my mother chewed the betel leaves in her mouth first before giving them to me. I had to swallow the bitter and unpleasant betel leaf pulp, while its juice was used to smear my body.

Before sunrise the next morning, I was bathed with water from the earthen jar. Not too long after, I began to feel better. I learnt that there could be some truth in the unspoken rules and regulations of living in a *kampung*.

Although the Malay community then believed all diseases and physical problems were connected to innumerable spirits, gnomes and ghosts, our school teacher made us dip our hands and feet in the smelly Jey's Fluid to prevent scabies. Perhaps scabies was not in the list of disorders caused by ghosts and the supernatural. We had often been warned by our religious teachers that *jins*, demons and spirits were specially created to destroy 'the sons of Adam'. We were told to practise patience and perseverance, as we were the number one target of misguided spirits.

At times, without our parents' knowledge, we would slip into the jungle fringe behind our house. Armed with catapults (made from Y-shaped tree branches, pieces of car tyre tubing and tongues of old shoes) and pocketfuls of small pebbles, we wandered into forbidden territory. Birds and squirrels were our targets. But if we encountered *ayam hutan* (jungle fowl), we automatically turned tail and fled in terror as we had heard lots of spooky stories about them. These wild fowl were supposed to either harbour or be guarded by certain spirits. They could also disappear at the bat of an eyelid. More frighteningly, if we attacked them, we would contract difficult-to-cure spirit-inflicted diseases. Furthermore, according to old wives' tales, wild fowls and tigers were often near each other. With these horrific fears going through our young minds, we usually scampered from the spot whenever we heard one crowing.

One day, while searching for bamboo to make festive bamboo-lamps, we came across an eerie-looking contraption that made our hair instantly stand on end. It looked like a small mosquito net hung from a tree branch. Inside the net was a bamboo platform on which were placed betel leaves, dried areca nuts, cigarettes, glutinous rice, sweet cakes and *ketupats* (rice cooked in small woven coconut leaf baskets). The sweet cakes and *ketupats* were of miniature size. All around the platform were strips of *mengkuang* leaves at the end of which were hung small woven *mengkuang* birds and more *ketupats*.

Not only did our hair stand on end, we felt like our heads had swollen to twice their size. Terrified by the appearance of this strange contraption, we cut short our teenage adventure to return home. When I told my aunt, Mak Endak Mariam, about the 'spooky-looking thing', she scolded me straightaway and warned me "not to go to such places anymore." She then called out to my mother, "Looks like Mustapha has stumbled on an *anchak* in the jungle!"

My mother ordered me to bathe that very instant. Once I was dried with a towel, she smeared some kind of oil called *minyak chelak* on certain parts of my body, on the armpits, joints and behind my ears. *Minyak chelak* is actually a mixture of coconut oil, garlic, shallots, black pepper, a tiny piece of an old *mengkuang* mat, a shred of an old broom, and bits of an old umbrella and old shoes. A *bomoh* would then chant verses upon the oil after which it would be kept in a small bottle.

Smeared on certain parts of the body, *minyak chelak* is believed to have properties to ward off spirits like *bajang* (an evil spirit with long nails which haunts pregnant women and infants), *pelesit* (a spirit in the form of a vampire cricket) and *orang bunian* (gnomes, not necessarily evil, living and playing in the jungle).

I later heard that one of my four friends who came across the *anchak* with me became very ill upon arriving home. We were then told that the *anchak* was a contraption used to 'feed' ghosts and spirits roaming wild in the *kampung*. It was also used by *bomohs* to cure patients of severe unexplained diseases attributed to the supernatural.

Another Matang *bomoh* specialising in curing such problems was Pak Arshad, better known as 'Blind Arshad'. Curing those who needed his services provided him with a reasonable income. Another blind person, Pak Awang, who lived near the mosque, could also cure such afflictions, but was considered less effective than 'Blind Arshad'.

Pak Awang was an extremely clean person. He used barrels of water to wash just one sarong. Perhaps, it was because he was unable to see that the sarong was already clean. For his fine manners and unblemished

cleanliness, the *kampung* people did not have the heart to call him the ‘the blind one’ or ‘Blind Awang’, so they nicknamed him ‘Pak Awang Kelam’, or ‘The Blurred Pak Awang’. We boys called him ‘the detective’. No one knew his past, but I heard that he was once a *kampung* Cassanova with incredibly good looks. Perhaps that was why he was said to have been spiritually blinded (*chuchuk mata anak seluang*).

Since the British in those days did not run a Welfare Department to care for the blind, these unfortunate people support themselves by tramping from house to house, each carrying a burlap flour sack, begging for donations, either cash or food. They deserved these donations. I remember seeing my mother pouring a cigarette tin of rice into the sack each time one came by. Another source of income for these poor souls was the eleven or thirteen cents (always an odd number) token sum given for curing complaints related to the supernatural.

I remember a funny incident. Two blind men who had not talked to each other for years collided on a narrow bridge. Thinking that a sighted person had intentionally bumped into him, one of them shouted, “You blind man, can’t you see where you are going?” The other answered, “You are blind too! Can’t you see another person coming?” They had a short argument before leaving the bridge. Luckily, neither used the canes they carried in their hands.

My eldest brother Ahmed befriended these two *bomohs*, accumulating a wide knowledge of chants, such as *ilmu pengasih* (chants to induce a woman’s interest in oneself), *ilmu penunduk* (chants to make others obey one’s wishes), *ilmu kanching mulut anjing* (chants to lock the jaws of dogs – useful for when walking to school in the morning), *ilmu menawar bisa* (chants to reduce the pain of insect stings) and *ilmu menolong orang chekik tulang* (chants to help someone choking on a bone). I have seen him perform these chants quite effectively, for an amateur.

On another occasion, my friends and I were roaming along the Larut River while playing. Knowing we were running late, we hastily collected some fiddle-head ferns. We normally brought these edible young ferns as gifts, so that Mother would not get upset when we got home late.

While collecting the ferns, we saw another spooky-looking thing, a small *sampan* abandoned on the riverbank, filled with sweet cakes, betel leaves and areca nuts. The boat even had a small sail. According to my aunt, Mak Endak Mariam, this contraption was called a *lanchang*, a tiny boat floated down river to feed ‘The Water Ghost’, believed to be responsible for a villager’s long illness. Apparently, the man was so seriously ill that a *lanchang* had to be floated to cure him. ‘Feeding’ ghosts

and spirits using *anchak* and *lanchang* was vehemently condemned by religious teachers who preached that it was against Islamic teachings.

On another day, as I was about to enter my (Malay) school compound, I happened to see three eggs and other 'feeding ghosts' paraphernalia under a cluster of red hibiscus shrubs in full bloom. Scared out of my wits, I hurried to leave, but a bully from a higher class forced me to touch the shrubs.

When I returned home after school, I became feverish. I went into a delirium and began a strange monologue of fear. A *bomoh* was called to my house. The diagnosis: I had angered the spirit 'residing' in the 'feeding' (hibiscus) area.

The items needed by the *bomoh* to cure me were the same as those required by Pak Yit, but this time, my mother had to sacrifice three eggs instead of one, as this was a more severe case. According to the *bomoh*, the father of the bully who had forced me to touch the hibiscus bush had spirits and ghosts 'under his care'.

While studying the beeswax formations on the water in the earthen jar, the *bomoh* 'happened to see' the graceful *chempaka* (*michelia champaca*) tree with sweet-smelling white flowers in front of my house in the water. I loved this graceful tree, which sent redolent scents into our home through the many open Malay-style windows.

Apart from physical beauty, the tree was also a source of pocket money for us brothers. My mother and adopted sister Bakyah often strung the *chempaka* flowers into pretty strands which we sold to Chinese ladies in Matang. All ladies of that time, regardless of race, braided fresh and fragrant flowers into their hair.

According to the *bomoh*, the shady *chempaka* tree was a playground for *pontianak*, long-haired female ghosts appearing as beautiful dames to entice men. If we weren't careful, this tree could become "their permanent residence," he advised. So to our dismay, a death sentence was imposed on the innocent tree. Before long, we saw the felling of the much beloved tree.

Remaking Matang: Bound Feet and Rubber Tappers

At the beginning of this century, and during my childhood, the population of Matang was already a multiracial mix, mostly of Malays and Chinese, with a small number of Indians. They fished (*kerja laut*) in Port Weld (now Kuala Sepetang), worked in treacherous mangrove swamps (*kerja kayu*), tapped rubber and did odd jobs. Only a handful, including my father Haji Hussain bin Haji Aminuddin, served the British Government.

The series of Larut (Tin) Wars between two Chinese factions, Ghee Hin (Cantonese) and Hai San (Hakkas), had forced thousands of Chinese immigrants to flee from tin-rich, but tumultuous Taiping to tranquil Matang. Many Chinese mercenaries imported specifically to fight in the Tin Wars did not return to China after hostilities ended with the 1874 signing of the Pangkor Treaty. Consequently, the Matang Chinese population multiplied by leaps and bounds.

The construction of Malaya's first railway line, running from the mining town of Taiping to the coastal town of Port Weld in 1885, swelled the number of South Indian immigrants in Matang, which was midway between the two endpoints.

As a child, I had the privilege of seeing many shops run by Malays, including a *songkok* (Malay velvet headgear like a fez without a tassel) shop owned by an Indonesian Syed (Arab), who later became a family member by marriage. But as I got older, I saw Malay shops folding up and being taken over by Chinese proprietors. In addition to the Chinese, there was an astute Indian-Muslim shopkeeper who managed to attract Indian workers from three British estates (Jebong Estate, Matang Jambu Estate and Sungai Mati Lauderdale Estate) to patronise his shop rather than the shop at Simpang Empat, which was actually much nearer to two of the estates.

After Independence in 1957, two of the three estates were bought out by Chinese entrepreneurs. Consequently, thousands of Indian estate

workers were dislodged and forced to move out like colonies of ants evacuating their disturbed nests, in search of new livelihoods. Post-independence stories like these were many.

Chinese immigrants who came to Matang invariably carried poles (*pien tang*) on their shoulders, from which hung two bamboo baskets or cloth bundles, that often held all their worldly belongings, consisting of a change of clothes, a shabby, usually red blanket, and a small rectangular wooden block that served as a pillow. These poles were precious and never left their masters' sides. The poles also provided many with a means of livelihood (as vendor, water-carrier, night-soil carrier) and when needed, could serve as a defensive (even lethal) weapon.

The Matang Chinese I knew during my childhood wore flowing wide-legged pants with loose tunics, with many pockets. Their buttons were also made of cloth. But Chinese labourers who went roaming for odd jobs usually wore nothing more than a pair of work shorts. Their tightly plaited tails – a symbol of Manchu servitude – were either left hanging at the back or twisted up on the side of their partially-shaven heads. Some displayed sores on the shaven areas. The Malays termed this skin problem *ibu sawan* and attributed it to the Chinese habit of partaking of steaming hot food and tea.

As I grew older, more and more tails begin to vanish, dramatically replaced by crew cuts, or rather, styles where the hair was severely cropped above the ears and necks. Some explained that their dynamic young leader, Sun Yat Sen, had instructed them to do so. Yet others recounted a tragedy about how a Chinese man had died of drowning when his tail got entangled in some old branches in the shallow well he had fallen into.

The Chinese then were fond of spitting, a habit almost unheard of and abhorred by others. This habit took a lot of shaking off, especially among the older Chinese. The British authorities had to post countless 'No Spitting' signs on walls and trees.

We bought our household needs from a sundry shop owned by two skinny Chinese brothers, Ah Kim (older) and Ah Huat, who had thick glossy tails and *ibu sawan* patches on their heads. In turn, we sold them chicken eggs (we ate ducks' eggs, as these were bigger), coconuts, mangosteens, mangoes, and fresh and dried areca nuts. At the end of each month, we settled our accounts.

Areca nuts were in great demand by Malay women, and Indian men and women, who continually chewed them with betel leaves, daubs of lime, *gambier* bits and tobacco leaf veins. Luckily, this habit is almost gone since it has been found to cause mouth cancer.

During their leisure time, the brothers, who had quickly learned to speak Malay, loved to smoke *anghun* (a red-pigmented Chinese tobacco), using *unchui*, a Chinese water pipe that produced a small gurgling sound. The redder their eyes, the more intense their enjoyment. Nevertheless, if a customer walked in, they would immediately leave their water pipes to attend to the valued customer before returning to smoke their pipes with great gusto.

Sometimes, they smoked the same red-coloured tobacco using a small bamboo pipe that could be carried wherever they went as they entertained their customers. But I noticed they did not touch *rokok daun* (the Malay cigarette of tobacco wrapped in dried *nipah* palm shoots) or the Indian *cheroot* (tightly rolled cigars made of tobacco leaves).

One morning, while looking for one of the brothers at the back of the shop, I saw older brother Ah Kim inside a mosquito net. On taking a closer look, I saw him smoking a small pipe while lying down on a wooden head-rest with a small oil lamp next to him. He looked lost in a dream and was oblivious to my calling his name. That was the first time I saw someone smoking opium.

The Chinese I knew were peculiarly attached to their mosquito nets. If they moved to a new house, it was the first item they brought. Because they smoked opium inside their mosquito nets, the nets smelt of putrid opium, thus the Malay advice: "If you want to buy a mosquito net, do not buy one that belonged to a Chinese."

Opium was then an indisputable British monopoly, sold by an Opium Clerk sitting inside a small shop-house that had small windows with rusty iron bars. The front of the shop had a small opening with soiled frames in the wall, through which the clerk received money from customers, and through which he handed over a tiny amount of opium. The Malay Opium Clerk was hugely popular with the Matang Chinese. Before he sat down at the coffee shop, a chair would be pulled up for him and a cup of coffee would appear instantly without him even requesting it.

The Chinese were fastidious beyond words about oral hygiene. Each morning, as Sikh policemen at the Matang Police Station lined up for inspection, Chinese living in shops across the street also lined up, not with guns and carbines, but each with a basin of hot water, a toothbrush, a small tube of toothpaste, a tongue scraper and a face towel. (The tongue scraper was about six inches long and half an inch wide.)

At that time, Malays and Indians were still cleaning their teeth with their fingers. In place of toothpaste, they used fine sand or ash from their firewood stoves. If they used any brush, it was ingeniously made by pounding and flattening *keduduk* (Indian rhododendron) branches or

coconut fruit stems into brush-like instruments. When nylon toothbrushes finally came to Malaya, the Malays took to them eagerly, assured beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were not made of pig bristles.

Industrious and talkative Ah Kim and Ah Huat kept their customers happy and contented by both selling and buying items. Once, we were alarmed to learn that Ah Huat had suddenly disappeared. However, he returned a few months later with a wife in tow.

What intrigued us about Ah Huat's pale young bride was neither her elaborate hair pins nor her loose flowing tunic, which was visibly different from our mother's, but her incredibly tiny feet, with her tiny shoes of velvet and gold thread. They were almost as diminutive as a newborn baby's feet. We felt a strange mix of sorrow and amazement to see her hobbling and swaying on the uneven laterite soil in front of the shop. Yet, her tiny feet did not in the least hamper her from assisting her husband in running the sundry shop. Not long after, older brother Ah Kim also disappeared. He too came back with a teenage life-partner from China, which the Malays referred to as Tong San.

Next to the two brothers' sundry shop was a corner coffee shop owned by Ah Fatt, a smiling, podgy Hailam Chinese with two gold-capped front teeth. When I later saw a Buddha figurine, it reminded me of Ah Fatt from my childhood. Before I tell you more about Ah Fatt, let me elaborate on the phenomenal Malay fondness for coffee.

My mother roasted and ground our own coffee beans as it was cheaper than buying them from Ah Fatt. Using a well-kept family recipe, she mixed a small can of coffee beans with some sugar, butter and a little *gambier* before roasting. Malay family pride did not just depend on culinary skills and handwork, but also on the flavour and aroma of its coffee.

I used to hear Matang Malays lament, "No one can beat Hailam coffee. One can die if one does not get a cup a day." That was the reputation of Hailam coffee! Some said customers got 'addicted' to Hailam coffee because a tiny amount of opium was mixed with the ground coffee.

I often saw two Malay men sitting on wooden benches that Ah Fatt had strategically placed on the five-foot way (sidewalk) outside his shop. All day long, these two men were there, going into the shop several times to drink coffee. To my young mind, I thought they were well-off. I decided to compete with them. So, I sold more green mangoes to Sikh police constables and saved every cent.

At the annual celebration of *Hari Raya Puasa*, to mark the joyous end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, I fulfilled my cherished dream of drinking a bottle of 'cherryade' accompanied by Ah Fatt's mouth-watering *roti kahwin* (thick Hailam egg-custard sandwich). As a

young boy, nothing was more delicious and more expensive than that treat! As I got older, I found out, to my great disappointment, that the two Malay men who were always drinking coffee at the shop were loathsome parasites, living and drinking off other people.

Matang Chinese shopkeepers kept their business open till late, taking their evening meals in public view. Each evening, just before dusk, when the Muslims were busy returning home to perform their prayers, the shopkeepers set up their mobile circular tables on the sidewalk in front of their shops. There, they ate their evening meals, mostly comprising rice porridge, soup and salted vegetables.

I watched them use their chopsticks with great interest – the technique was so different from the Malays who ate using their fingers. Yet, no feat was too difficult for the two bamboo sticks. At home, I tried to imitate them by using ‘chopsticks’ made from thin bamboo stalks from our hedge. My mother smiled to herself when she saw me.

The Chinese I knew took great pains not to offend the Malays and Islam. If they bought pork, forbidden by Islam for consumption by Muslims, they would carefully wrap it up in huge lotus leaves and sneak the packages into their homes through their back doors.

The Matang Chinese I knew also had a real fear of policemen, especially as Matang was the location of the District Police Station, with a team of gigantic, red-turbaned Sikh policemen. They treated the local police sergeant with great reverence.

Contributions made by Matang Chinese went to the annual staging of a Chinese opera, held on a wooden makeshift stage in front of one of the temples. The stage featured a cheap vermilion cloth backdrop that divided the platform into two – the stage proper and backstage. Gaudily coloured props that included the unmistakably Chinese long knives, swords, spears and flags were placed on either side of the stage.

Prior to every performance, many types of prayer paper were burnt at a red outdoor altar in front of the stage, in an appeal to the gods to keep their ancestors safe. The noisy cymbal-dominated orchestra sat at the front on stage. Some musicians were bare-chested. Looking at their skeletal figures, I presumed they were opium smokers. The sound from their drums, cymbals, gongs and violins was deafening. It was loudest during fighting scenes that generally involved emperors and generals.

The actors wore crude artificial beards and moustaches, with eye make-up extending dramatically to their temples. Some wore garish caps with pretty peacock feathers. Others had small flags stuck to their waistbands; the higher the general’s rank, the more flags to his name and waistband.

The performers had to be not only imaginative, but also versatile. Some stories called for singing, dancing and acrobatics by the same performer. An actor also had to convey the images to the audience. For example, a solitary performer in a general's outfit could have the task of representing an entire army of unbeatable fighting men. In the absence of more elaborate props, a chair or a table could represent a palace, a bridge, a house or a mountain range.

In general, Chinese opera plays could be divided into two categories – military and civilian. But more often than not, military stories were performed, depicting aristocrats and generals in their many wars. All performers then were males, with some taking female roles. When my friends and I peeped backstage, we saw some painting their faces red, pink, blue and green, while others were seen washing their faces with warm water. Their fancy costumes with multi-coloured sequins and shimmering glass beads glittered in the light.

My friends and I did not watch the opera much as we did not understand Chinese. But I noticed that when a General or an Emperor raised his sword and shouted a protracted “y-aaaaa-t,” that was also the moment when the musicians sounded their instruments loudest. The Emperor or General sometimes raised his feet high above the floor until the audience could see the sole of his shoe. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Malays did not like to watch Chinese opera. To the Malays, and the Thai people, it was considered offensive and uncouth for anyone to show his feet, especially the soles, to others.

However, there was a great pull for us Matang boys to go to the opera. The attraction was not on stage, but by the roadside, in the form of vendors selling ice cream, boiled corn, sugar-cane juice, sugar-cane portions, pickled fruits and peanuts.

If Chinese immigrants carried their worldly possessions using peddling poles, the Indians carried them in cloth bundles on their heads. These usually included pots and pans, knives, a machete, a sack and a change of clothes made from very rough fabric.

Some Indian immigrants had walked barefoot for over fifty miles from Penang to Matang looking for jobs in several British estates. But once they got here, they discovered that the estates already had sufficient labourers. So, they had no choice but to tramp from house to house looking for odd jobs, living from hand to mouth. They were willing to tap rubber, dig drains, weed vegetable plots, feed cattle and clear undergrowth for just thirty or forty cents a day.

Although my family could have as many Indian workers as we wanted at any time, my father only employed two, Sinnapen and Darma,

on a regular monthly basis. One lived in a small hut by the river; the other in a room underneath our house that stood on pillars eight feet above the ground.

They could not live in one house, let alone one room, because Sin-napen was of a higher caste than Darma, a *pariah* or 'untouchable', according to books I read. The great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi had the support of people like Darma, who wanted the abolition of such an oppressive system. I hear it is still strong in India, though in Malaysia, it is a dying practice.

Even as a boy, I wholeheartedly sympathised with Darma. I noticed that when he went to buy *dosai* (an Indian pancake) from another Indian, he had to stand far away from the seller. When it was time to receive the food or his change, Darma had to stretch both his hands way out to collect them. I was told that even at the toddy (intoxicating fermented juice from coconut trees) shop, *pariah* Indians had to drink from enamel mugs specially set aside for them. What justified this inhuman discrimination among men? It is no surprise that Islam spread rapidly in Bangladesh, because according to Muslim doctrine, all Muslims are equal in the eyes of Allah.

The Indians I knew sat cross-legged on mats and ate with their fingers, just like us Malays. Some made small neat rice balls and threw them into their waiting mouths. Some drank from glasses raised several inches above their mouths, with not a drop spilt. Now, whenever I see a *teh tarik* man perform, cooling his tea by repeatedly pouring it between two hand-held containers held far apart above each other, it reminds me of my younger days. I also saw Indians eating off banana leaves. Apparently only the poor ate out of plates, as they could not afford to change their 'plates' every time they ate.

Other than those working on British estates, some Indian labourers worked on rubber smallholdings belonging to Indian owners at the back of our house. They often came to my mother asking her to help mend their clothes or to borrow our flour mortar. We always helped them. Sometimes, they begged us to let them listen to our gramophone, or to watch us play the accordion and harmonium.

Every now and then, a travelling Indian musician would knock on our door. He was usually accompanied by a dusky young girl, a trained monkey, or both. Naked except for a wrinkled sarong and headgear, he would play his harmonium with very agile fingers while singing Tamil songs. In between, the mischievous emaciated monkey performed little tricks to amuse the audience. At the end of the performance, the lethargic girl went around holding an enamel mug to collect donations.

It upset me to hear Indian and Sri Lankan political leaders in Malaysia make unfair comments that the Malays had an easy life. In fact, these Indian and Sri Lankan leaders were the ones living in luxury, while their followers, the Indian masses, lived in squalor. Such disparity!

With such a large number of Indian immigrants flocking into Matang, the British set up a toddy shop for them. It was a thatched-roof shed, without walls, but with rows of benches and long tables. Each afternoon, drinkers assembled at the shop, like thirsty bees around a honey pot. Some came with firewood on their heads, but as soon as they had made their sales, the money went to mugs of toddy instead of food for their poor families. From our house, we could hear the toddy shop's goings-on, like a distant humming of bees in a hive.

After drinking and getting tipsy, they dragged their feet to their respective estates. Those going back to Jebong Estate had to walk past us, playing near the mosque. These drinkers reacted differently to the toddy. Some became unexpectedly bold, almost violent and ready to pick fights, by saying, for example, "I am very drunk. Who dares fight me? One punch from me and you will die twice!" The bigger boys among us responded, "Don't talk big. Just one push, and you will be down and out!" Others became timid and would appeal, "I am not looking for a fight. I am a little drunk." He would then add "*Naleki va*" or "Let's wait till tomorrow," as if fights could be postponed.

Indian men then had long wavy hair tied in buns at the back of their heads. Some wore ruby earrings. On their foreheads were *potu* (Hindu ritualistic dot placed at the centre of the forehead), and sometimes, white lime-paste stripes. Other times, they drew white lines on their chests. I noticed that the lower caste Hindus were the first to cut their hair short. Indian women also had long wavy hair, which they tied up in tight buns decorated with flowers, especially the fragrant *bunga melor* (jasmine). They had pierced ears, like Malay women, and because of their heavy ornamental earrings, their ear lobes drooped, and some looked as if they were about to tear.

With the coming of Indian immigrants, British estate owners began to replace Malay estate workers with them because these newcomers were willing to work for only thirty or forty cents a day. Their needs were very modest. They could fall asleep on a mere gunny sack, and they were also hardy, able to work in the scorching sun for long hours because the heat here was milder than in South India. Their food was also very simple, mostly rice with dried fish, brinjals (eggplants or aubergines) and fried dried chillies. Thus, even with such meagre incomes, they could remit money to their families in India.

Estate workers were often broken into groups, each minding certain portions of their estates. For example, for fifty labourers, there would be two overseers to supervise the tappers and a *mandore* to keep the weeders working.

Lauderdale Estate's thoughtful British owner constructed a small Hindu temple next to a towering tree. Each year, his estate workers held an Indrasabba, a kind of stage show, when the idols of their revered deities were ritually bathed in a nearby river. During the day, we went to the estate to watch, awed at the sight of Hindu religious leaders and followers walking on burning charcoal embers while carrying heavy *kavadis* (Hindu sacrificial burdens) on their shoulders. Some offered additional attractions; their tongues and cheeks were pierced with sharp objects. All of the devotees looked like they were in a stupor or a deep trance. We were told that these men had fasted and attended special prayers for many months in preparation.

Many people went to see the Indrasabba stage show held at night. It was appreciated by Malay men and women as the presentation resembled Malay opera (*bangsawan*). Sometimes, it even included Malay songs and comic sketches. Just like at the Chinese opera, vendors had a fine day selling food, especially Indian delicacies (*muruku, vadai, masala vadai*), peanuts, drinks and ice cream. We boys preferred to be near the vendors rather than watch the Indrasabba.

The Malays of Matang: Steeped in Tradition

The Malay fishermen of Matang and Port Weld then owned their own boats, nets and fish traps. In fact, one of the big names in this industry was a stout, fair-complexioned Malay with a hearty laugh and an appetite to match. Aptly called 'Saad Putih' (fair-skinned Saad), he loaned out fishing boats and gears on condition that all the catches were sold to him. He drove a huge car and was able to go on a pilgrimage (*haj*) to Mecca at a relatively young age. His son inherited the thriving business, but just like the other Malay businessmen I knew then, he too lost his business to a Chinese.

At that time, only a handful of motorboats belonged to Malays. The majority of fishermen in the area borrowed equipment from Chinese dealers on the same terms that all the catch went to them. As Malay fishermen were not allowed to witness the weighing in, most of them were cheated of their earnings.

Unlike today, the Malay community of my childhood participated actively in the running of the British-owned rubber estates. They were employed at every stage of rubber production: clearing the jungle, planting the seedlings, weeding undergrowth, tapping the trees and processing rubber sheets. The British could hire Malays for they were skilled in many estate tasks, but chose instead to employ Indian immigrants for they were willing to work for next to nothing. Furthermore, with the influx of Indians willing to live in little cubicles on the estates, Malay workers gradually vanished. The Malays, however poor, were not willing to stay in these cubicles as they owned humble, but permanent homes in their respective *kampung*s.

A few enterprising Malays developed their own rubber smallholdings, but none had more than ten acres. The British did not in any way encourage Malays to own large, profitable plantations. They deemed that the Malays should remain poor and submissive so that their children and grandchildren would be content with small-salaried jobs. Moulding a

sophisticated Malay intelligentsia or entrepreneurial class would only create problems the British did not care to handle.

To celebrate festivities and weddings, many economically backward Malays, who would rather “lose their children rather than forsake tradition,”¹ resorted to the suicidal practice of borrowing from avaricious *chettians* (Indian moneylenders, mostly from Tamil Nadu in India), only to find they could not meet the repayment schedule involving exorbitant interest rates. Consequently, they lost their collateral – plots of land which were often their only assets – and their homes which were sitting on these plots. Sad to say, the loathsome *chettians* had willing Malay accomplices who acted as lures to encourage other Malays to borrow.

Alarmed by these economically debilitating *chettiar* land transactions, the British introduced the Malay Reservations Enactment, first mooted by Frederick Belfield, Legal Adviser to the Government. Despite reservations by certain non-Malay quarters, the Sultan of Perak agreed to this. Malay Reservation Grants – popularly known as ‘Red-ink Grants’ – were not to be sold to non-Malays. Yet, there were Malays willing to allow *chettians* to use their names on legal sale and purchase documents.

To reverse the tide, the British suggested another measure – setting up co-operatives. This measure was initially opposed by Muslim religious officials, but the far-sighted Sultan – who saw the danger of more Malays losing their land to *chettians* – intervened and called for a policy review that gave birth to the co-operative movement.

Malay estate workers in the Matang Jambu Estate worked under a Malay *mandore* named Chik who was answerable to the English Estate Manager, Mr Spellwinde, or ‘Mr Spollen’ to the Malays. Spellwinde was succeeded by a small-built, taciturn Mr Jack, who had lost a hand in an accident. According to the Malay estate workers, their white managers were fair and kind to them.

If the Chinese had operas and the Indians their Indrasabbas, the Malays had *boria* groups, a singing group presentation still popular today. There were two *boria* groups in Matang, one led by Mohd Yatim from Matang Jambu Estate and the other by Pak Ban, an engine operator on the Matang Road Estate.

Boria shares many features with Christmas carolling. It was performed once a year, at night, during a certain month, and attracted a lot of young children. *Boria* groups were active during Safar, the second month of the Muslim calendar. After weeks of practice, *boria* groups would travel from house to house, performing in front of the homes. They were invariably followed by an enthusiastic audience of chatty sarong-clad *kampung* boys.

The *boria* groups chose houses they knew had the means to donate some money. As soon as they arrived in front of our house, they lined themselves up in two rows, with their leader carrying a white cane. The entire group wore identical, hastily made outfits, reminiscent of American cowboys complete with hats and scarves, while on another occasion, they wore white ankle-length Arab robes.

Several amateur musicians with bamboo flutes and large drums stood by in the wings, while a clown and a man in woman's clothes stood nearby. Once the music started, with the drums making the most noise, the *boria* leader would sing *pantun* (Malay quatrains), followed by the chorus from the entire group. I remember one quatrain running like this:

We the Badawi group
 Are the stubborn group
 We care for no one
 As we rule this Jebong town

Most quatrains were composed impromptu, usually showering praises on the owner of the house being visited. For example, Pak Ban sang that my father was "the generous and caring Clerk Hussain." After complimenting my father no end, he would move to my brother Ahmed, who everyone knew was a bright student. He sang that my brother would go far in life, but unfortunately, my brother died just after turning twenty. To compose these clever impromptu quatrains, the *boria* leader only needed to know the names of some of the house residents and other bits of information, usually obtained from the neighbours. They knew almost all our names as they came to our home every year.

In between the singing, with the deafening drums going 'gedum-gedum', the amateur clown and a male performer in woman's attire crudely performed a few popular dances of the day. The clown, who bloated his belly by securing a *kapok*-filled pillow under his shirt, demonstrated funny little stunts that made us guffaw in hilarity. As it was improper for women to laugh aloud or to be seen, my aunts, sisters and mother giggled from behind lace window curtains.

When the travelling entertainment was gone, the Malay boys followed them, leaving our flowerbeds in complete shambles. These boys were often bare-chested, with some having skin like that of an old rhinoceros. Without soft fragrant bath soaps, they usually used laundry soap bars, that is, if their family were lucky enough to afford soap at all.

When a new leader took over the Jebong *boria* group, a new twist was introduced to the presentation. The pot-bellied clown took to wearing a top hat, a monocle and pants. It made me wonder later: did these

Malays already know how to, or wished to, mock the British colonialists; did they already harbour the seeds of anti-colonialism?

In another year, the group wore white shirts with red pants. To Malays, red and white are the colours of courage and truth. We believe in *berani kerana benar* or 'in truth we find courage'. Were these *boria* performers early Malay nationalists striving for Malaya's independence? Could this be the reason the British banned *boria* in Penang on the pretext that *boria* activities were linked to gangsterism?

House owners visited by the *boria* groups normally donated between one and two dollars each. During World War I, one dollar could buy a *gantang* (the Malay gallon, equal to six *kati* of rice) and two *kati* (about one and one-third pounds) of flour. I was told the donation would be used to purchase a cow that would be slaughtered for a festival to celebrate Safar (the second month of the Muslim calendar) Day. This festival spot by the Larut River was near the grave of Malay warrior Datuk Sagor.

Although invited, I did not attend any of the riverbank celebrations. Each time I asked for permission, my aunt Mak Endak Mariam forbade me, advising, "Do not go, they are the *orang kebun*" (plantation workers). I was much older before I realised that Matang residents considered Malays working in British estates as beneath them, and not quite up to the mark of the original Matang Malay community.

Another performance we looked forward to was the intriguing *makyong* dance-drama, performed by about sixteen performers. *Makyong* involves a combination of romantic drama, dance, operatic singing and broad comedy, and was always performed by a cast of young attractive women with a few men.

Once a year, the Mat Ali Makyong Group came from Kedah to perform in a makeshift hut near the present office of the Matang headman. There were usually eight male performers: one musician banging a pair of deep-rimmed hanging gongs (*tawak tawak*), two on the double-leaded barrel-drums (*gendang*), one on a type of drum with parchment stretched on one side only (*rebana*), one on the spike fiddle (*rebab*), one violinist and two clowns. The female performers, consisting of one in the role of the princess and several dancers, were all very young, and the main attraction.

The story enacted was often based on the ever-popular Sri Rama shadow play. The two clowns, wearing funny red masks, spoke in a very popular Kedah (state in north-western Malaya) accent and performed little tricks like eating a whole banana in one gulp through a slit in the mask. This brought thunderous applause and laughter from audiences perpetually thirsting after entertainment.

Makyong female dancers wore long curved gold-plated nail ornaments – like Thai dancers. Sometimes, a female performer was seen running after a male, hitting him repeatedly with a split cane, that made loud noises, but hardly inflicting any pain. The male *pakyong* performer I remember was a servant who, together with the clowns, trailed the entourage of the wealthy prince and princesses. They moved in circles in the small arena in the makeshift hut, joking and singing in merriment. Sometimes, the dainty princess joined in the singing too. In this manner, they moved from palace to garden, to mountaintop, to the forest, with the faithful clown following them all the while.

Admission to the *makyong* was ten cents per person. The tickets were ‘printed’ by writing the amount in red or blue on the inside of a cigarette pack.

In 1918, when I was about eight, children wore the same clothes to school, to play and to bed. We did not wear pyjamas. The sarongs we wore were called ‘German *pulaikats*’, but some said they came from Japan as the Germans were then at war with the British. The cloth was fairly cheap and rough, and the colour ran. But no better quality sarongs were easily available. Our tunics were made of equally rough material except for those worn during the major Muslim celebrations of *Hari Raya Puasa* and *Hari Raya Haji*, when they were specially stitched from silk, satin or other soft fabric.

Hardly any Malay boy wore Western shirts or coats as they were beyond our means. My first coat, made of khaki material, cost me all of the \$5.75 that it took me forever to save from selling mangoes. Stitched by a squint-eyed Chinese tailor, two buttons adorned the ends of the sleeves, which were worn slightly folded, in line with the fashion of the day. I was as proud as a peacock in my shirt and coat.

We wore velvet *songkoks* of red, black, blue and green on our heads. They were bought once a year, again to celebrate the Muslim holiday of *Hari Raya Puasa*. But for the poor, a *songkok* was worn for so many years that the velvet got so thin, its lining could be seen clearly.

Most boys did not wear shoes because they were not easily available and were costly. There were black canvas shoes with black soles, but despite being not durable were very expensive. Only two shops in the entire town of Taiping sold shoes. But if a child attended English school, a pair of shoes was a must. The ‘Bell’ brand, made by Tan Kah Kee Company Ltd, was the most popular. They were expensive, but durable. Malays recounted how the Chinese man who manufactured these shoes had dreamt of a bell while searching for a suitable trademark. I still think his shoes became popular because his name ‘Kah Kee’ sounds just like the Malay word for feet, *kaki*.

For prayers or when attending religious classes, we took great care to clean ourselves, change into fresh clothes and put on thick, wooden clogs that clacked noisily. Sometimes, as we brothers made our way to the mosque, we deliberately increased the clacking, just to break the monotony of the still night.

Wearing clogs to the mosque was necessary, to avoid getting our feet into three different kinds of undesirables – blobs of greenish-brown cow dung that littered the road, excreta from male pigs that dawdled from one end of the street to sire new generations of pigs at the other end, and burnt prayer paper dropped by Chinese mourners as they accompanied coffins along the road. Wooden clogs were cheap and easily available, especially along Market Street in Taiping. These clog shops have since been converted to other businesses as no one wears clogs anymore.

In my childhood days, we could not afford to go to a tailor. Stitched by our mother and sisters, our clothes were a lousy fit, but they were the best we knew. If I could turn back the clock and be young all over again, I would like to wear a pair of pants with two pockets on the side, two at the back and two below my knees; an orange shirt with two pockets at the breast, and two on the sleeves; plus a pair of cowboy boots. I would eat, drink and sleep in this dream outfit!

Dainty Malay girls of my time wore plain or *batik* sarongs with loose Kedah-cut tunics or figure-hugging blouses called *kebayas*. It was taboo for any female to go out of the house without a *selendang*, a long shawl worn over the shoulders, round the neck or over the head. She had to at least have a small towel on her head or over one shoulder. Girls usually wore cloth slippers or wooden clogs with tiny flowers painted on them. The older women were so stubborn about not wearing shoes that their soles were thick and hard to the extent that pebbles, thorns and wood splinters could hardly penetrate them.

Adult Malay women wore *batik* sarong, *batik lepas* (longer pieces of *batik* wound around) and plain sarongs. *Batik lepas* was sometimes worn with a corset made by winding several yards of material around the waist. To attend weddings and festivities, Malay women wore attractive long *kebayas* that went below the knees, often made from expensive satin or silk.

Note

1. *Biar mati anak, jangan mati adat* (a Malay saying).

Malay School Education (1916-20)

Most pupils then went to school at a late age, some as old as ten, but my education-hungry father Hussain sent me to the Matang Malay School when I was barely five. I was the youngest pupil, the baby of the class.

Although the school was very near our home, either willowy Sinnapen or sweaty Darma carried me on their bare, muscular shoulders to and from school. These two South Indian labourers were employed full-time by my father to do odd jobs; a major one was tapping rubber trees in our small-holding and a minor one was transporting me to and from school.

The school building, the most modern at that time, had cemented front steps, stout and square brick pillars, red tile roofing, and unvarnished wooden floorboards. However, its walls and windows were traditional, made of split and woven bamboo (*tepas*). Its square window leaves opened upwards and were propped up with wooden sticks. Whenever we could not locate the sticks, wooden make-believe guns used in our marching exercises were substituted. By 1976,¹ the school had become the Khea Wah National Type (Chinese) Primary School. It was unchanged, but for its bamboo wickerwork walls, which had been replaced by local timber.

Our marching drills were led by Headmaster Hashim bin Mohamad, a member of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF). All marching commands were given in English, like ‘stand at ease’, ‘attention’ and ‘present arms’. ‘Stand easy’ was by far our favourite command as it enabled us to squirm a little, and to scratch our spindly legs. Somehow, our drills never failed to coincide with the hours when sand-flies were most active.

There was one exercise, each time the Headmaster shouted, “Jidging tim kumin,” that called for three movements of both hands. It was years later, after attending English school for several years, that I realised the command was actually “Judging time commence.”

Headmaster Hashim was an excellent, dedicated and diligent teacher who undertook his teaching with utmost seriousness. His father, also a teacher, was nicknamed ‘Pak Mat Sekolah’ (‘School Pak Mat’). He was

fondly remembered by the *kampung* folk for his wise and practical approach to life.

An extremely handsome man, Headmaster Hashim was effortlessly immaculate and well-groomed. His usual work attire consisted of a *pulaikat* sarong, a five-buttoned khaki coat, a black *songkok* and either a pair of shoes or traditional Malay leather sandals called *chupal*. A small pocket watch, hung on a shimmering silver chain, was hidden in his top coat-pocket. A gold pendant adorned his top buttonhole, the highest fashion of the day. Dapper Headmaster Hashim had equally elegant handwriting, in romanised Malay, and Arabic Jawi script to match. I respected this refined gentleman all my life; he died in the Holy Land of Mecca.

Our Assistant Headmaster, who hailed from a Sumatran royal family, wore clothes just like his superior, but always succeeded in looking hopelessly unbecoming, especially with his habit of carrying, on his shoulder, a common-looking small towel that the Chinese used to wipe off sweat or as a cover for bathing in public. His coat buttons were made from any material, sometimes from common gunny (jute) string.

Strangely, he had an unexplained detestation for the colour red. In our arithmetic class, we used *dokak*, a kind of upright abacus with white, green, yellow, black and red beads. If a pupil's calculation fell on a red bead, he'd had it. The Assistant Headmaster would get up and thrash the boy. Sometimes, he broke into a form of Malay martial art *silat* class. My friend, Mohd Darus bin Mohd Yusof was often forced to spar with him.

Another of his peculiarities was that each time he made his way between the rows of desks where his pupils were sitting, for no apparent rhyme or reason, he would use his cane to swipe at their legs and arms along the way. He would repeat, "Watch out, I am carving my way."

Once, when a boy asked permission to leave the class for a drink of water, the Assistant Headmaster demanded that the boy stick out his tongue, after which he flipped the end of his cane on the poor boy's tongue. After that, no one dared to ask permission to leave class for whatever reason, so much so that some did their business in their sarongs in class. But this weird Assistant Headmaster was an outstanding teacher, especially of geography. He used very ordinary things to describe geographical features and phenomena. For example, he used Darus's head and *songkok* to describe the relationship between the sun and the rotating earth.

He punished pupils who were slow at their arithmetic by making them stand on their chairs for hours or other humiliating and painful means.

This especially enraged the older and larger-sized students. One afternoon, a 'big' student whom he had caned mercilessly waylaid and attacked him with a thick coconut palm branch.

The Principal of the Matang Teachers' College, Alexander Keir, recognised this teacher's natural talents and accepted him for a two-year course. Mr Keir, who later became Perak State Inspector of Schools, was one white man who cared about the fate of the Malays and who gave his all to help them get ahead in life, especially in education.

In his mission for excellence, my Assistant Headmaster took English lessons from my oldest brother, Ahmed, but it was often a series of arguments, rather than classes. For example, my brother would try to explain that certain nouns could become verbs with the addition of the word 'to' as in 'to fish'. The teacher would then respond, "Oh, that is real easy. So can we say 'to bird' then?"

My brother's attempt to clarify why 'to bird' was unacceptable led to such a heated argument that the class ended prematurely. My wise mother calmed the situation by advising my brother, "Perhaps it is better that you take care of your own education instead of giving him lessons."

I joined the Matang Malay School as a starry-eyed pupil of 'Standard Nought'. For several months, we sat cross-legged on the rough wooden floor as school furniture was in short supply. Alphabets and numbers were learnt by copying them onto slate boards placed on our sarong-clad laps. Bit by bit, we carried more items to school, including a ruler, a bottle of water and some *ari-ari* leaves, which, when soaked in water, was excellent for wiping the slate board clean.

By observing the older pupils, we pre-schoolers learnt that the school's wide outdoor banisters had other uses, among them, for sharpening slate-pencils and for sliding down on.

In 1917, I entered Standard One, where we graduated to sitting on large creaky chairs joined to flap-topped desks. What pride it gave us to sit there! It gave me courage to ask my mother for more pocket money. Was I not in a higher class now? Furthermore, the two brothers sitting next to me were eating several packets of rice cooked in coconut milk (*nasi lemak*) every day. Was I not entitled to that privilege too? My mother responded dryly, "What? Are you going to school to learn or to eat?"

Some schoolboys, being schoolboys, were rather naughty. From them, I learnt to play truant, not for many hours, but just a few minutes. After gaining permission to go to the toilet, I would instead slip under the school building to collect lion-ants found in the sandy soil. A strand of hair, usually pulled from a friend's scalp, was slowly lowered into a nesting hole. After a short while, I could feel the hair being tugged, again and

again. That was the moment to begin pulling the hair out of the hole very slowly. The fun was in deftly pulling the lion-ant, still clinging to the hair, out of its hiding place.

Once I was asked by the bigger boys to slip under the school building to light a cigarette that was already attached to a long tube. In this way, the bigger boys would take turns to quickly run downstairs on some excuse, take a puff on the already lighted cigarette, and slip back into class. When this was discovered, the enraged, red-faced Headmaster cut the tube that held the cigarette into bits. I don't remember the punishment that befell those boys.

During school recesses, when we were allowed to play in the school compound, I often spent time gathering meadow-ants from their sandy nesting holes. After stripping a love-grass stem clean, I would lower it into the ant-hole and leave it there until I could see the stem move. I would then slowly pull the stem up, bringing the meadow-ant, still attached to the stem by its mouth, out of its hiding place.

More often than not, we kept our catches in matchboxes to take home. Whenever we were compelled to play indoors at our father's insistence, we held meadow-ant 'fights'. First, we pulled the antennae of two prime meadow-ants, put them face-to-face, and let them fight and bite each other until a defeated one voluntarily left the scene. Sometimes, friends and neighbours came with their own stock of meadow-ants. In that way, we would have hours of fun, without leaving the house at all.

Darus was once caught playing *kaku* (a game played using tiles) besides the school building by Headmaster Hashim, who lived in a house just behind the school. Darus was using one-cent coins, instead of tiles. As it was considered a form of gambling, he was punished. When asked to hold his palms out to the front, Darus begged the Headmaster to instead cane him with his hands held out at the back. The infuriated Headmaster delivered his Volunteer Corps swagger stick several times on Darus's palms, but Darus did not shed a single tear or flinch.

As I was still a child, I did not know how and when World War I broke out, but I began to feel its effects when German-manufactured slate-pencils became increasingly expensive, rising from one cent to ten cents. One cent could then buy four different kinds of spices. After a while, slate-pencils were no longer available. Substitute chalk was brittle and not as clear. So, many of us scoured the large drain behind the school for slate-pencils which had been discarded during better times. We waded in the smelly and murky water, disregarding broken glass and filth. The valued treasure we sought were slate-pencils, no matter how short, which could be lengthened by attaching them to lengths of small hedge-bamboo.

At the height of World War I, prices of consumer goods skyrocketed. Rice was rationed, a *kepul* (unit of rice, slightly more than a condensed milk can) for each buyer. As there were many residents in our home, and womenfolk were not encouraged to go out of the house unchaperoned, we boys took turns to line up, sometimes up to three times a day.

I heard that a German ship called the *Emden* had sneaked into Penang and attacked Russian ships when half the crew was dancing the night away on shore-leave. After the incident, we were told that many locals refrained from eating fish as human fingers were rumoured to have been found in some of the bigger fishes. I also saw my father make his contribution to the British Government in Malaya by buying shares in the *HMS Malaya*.

That was all I remember of World War I. I continued to go to school and was promoted every year without any ado. By Standard IV, we had replaced our slate boards and slate pencils with nib, ink and paper. My pocket money was also increased. Once a week, we were marched off to the Matang Teachers' College where we became guinea-pigs to trainee teachers. There, we met enthusiastic future teachers buoyed by their new challenges.

One day, Headmaster Hashim announced the names of pupils chosen to represent the school at the annual district inter-school sports, to be held at the King Edward VII School (English) in Taiping, six miles from my home. Those not on the list could attend, but had to find their own way there.

As we had to set out very early on the morning of the event, we slept in our classrooms the night before. Mounting excitement made us lose sleep. At 4.30 am, all of us, sleepy but excited, assembled in the still dark school compound before clambering on to a bullock cart owned by Qur'an Teacher Salbiah. It was steered by Pakiry Samy, who had once worked as my father's buggy syce until his ear was nipped by our huge horse. Boys not able to get into the bullock cart walked behind with wooden make-believe guns on their shoulders. It was a noisy group of boys, talking, singing and shouting in the wee hours of the morning. Despite the high noise level, some actually managed to continue their sleep on the bullock cart.

The sports ground was gaily decorated with flags, buntings and colourful tents. My first event was the 100 yards sprint in which I gained second place. With the 50 cents prize money, I looked for the noodles and iced water vendor to have my fill. After that, I was called to take part in the wheelbarrow race, partnering Yahaya, a much older boy from Matang Jambu Estate. As he was big and strong, I 'pretended' to move

my hands and felt I was being lifted and pushed to the winning line during the race.

We won 75 cents each as first-prize winners. I searched for the *rojak* (mixed sliced vegetables and fruits seasoned with a spicy sauce) vendor and had a plateful. At that time, no trophies or plaques were presented. Prizes were either in the form of cash or gifts such as handkerchiefs, soaps and hair oil. I earned \$3 that day from several events, but it was all spent on food for my brother and I. When it was time to participate in the marching event, I disappeared. Marching was not an event that offered prizes.

My Malay school was often visited by two teachers, Pak Mahadi and Pak Itam. Pak Itam was nicknamed ‘Pak Itam Sengau’ or ‘Nasal Pak Itam’ for his speech impediment. Pak Mahadi looked fierce as he sported the ‘moustache of the day’, a thick bushy one similar to what the white man wore. And when the white man adopted what looked like toothbrush bristles, so did the Malays. As a result, Pak Mahadi no longer looked as fierce as before, like a tiger that had lost its canine teeth. When moustaches went out of fashion among the white men, moustaches also disappeared from the faces of the Malays.

I thought the British were fair in their employment policy. Despite his speech impediment, Pak Itam was given an important position. Similarly, ‘Arshad Chengkol’ or ‘Twisted-arm Arshad’ gained a teaching job in a Kuala Kangsar English school.

Every weekday afternoon, I attended Islamic Religious School, then known as Qur’an School, where we were taught to read the Holy Qur’an and the basic tenets of Islam, such as how to pray, how to take ablution and how to fast. Parents were extremely happy with this arrangement; their children gained education for ‘this world’ in the morning, while in the afternoon, they learnt to prepare for the ‘next world’. It also meant children were in good hands almost the entire day on weekdays. It was the perfect schedule! Now (in 1976), Islamic religious education is a subject in all Malay and English schools.

My Qur’an School is still standing; it is now the residence of Matang’s Junior Headman. The school was without furniture; just a large blackboard and a few small foldable wooden bases (*rehal*) for placing Qur’ans. Ribs of coconut palm leaves were our bookmarks and indicators. We recited the Qur’an, following the teacher, while sitting cross-legged on the floor. Those who came early had walls or pillars to lean against.

Learning to read the Qur’an was no major worry as there were no promotion examinations. We referred to our teacher Lebai Ismail as ‘Tok Guru’ or ‘Revered Teacher’. In the absence of an assistant, he sometimes

delegated his task to those who were already proficient. He had a mean cane, but never used it on slow pupils, just on naughty ones, especially those who played truant. More often, it was used to hit the floor to quiet noisy students.

The Qur'an teacher had one minor weakness; he was addicted to soccer, so we nicknamed him the 'Soccer-Mad Tok Guru'. Each time a game was scheduled at the Matang football field, he let us out early, much to our delight.

At that time, entertainment was hard to come by. There were the silent movies, the *bangsawan*, *sepak raga* (kickball game using a woven rattan ball) and soccer. Of the four, soccer was about the only appropriate entertainment for a religious teacher, and even then, only as a non-cheering spectator. What would members of the Muslim community say if they saw a Qur'an teacher attend movies or operas, or play soccer or *sepak raga*? But being what they are, human beings, regardless of race, culture, gender, age and economic backgrounds, need entertainment all the same.

We sympathised with our Qur'an teacher when we heard of his innocent fondness for soccer being vehemently criticised by the older religious fraternity, who pointed out that it was unbecoming for someone of his position to be seen watching soccer games. This fondness became most pronounced when he would clap his hands. Weren't religious leaders important in determining the religious development of members of the community? Enlightened religious teachers, like our 'Soccer-mad Tok Guru', had their share of opposition from strict old-fashioned seniors who would not flow with the changing times.

Our Qur'an teacher had an extremely fair and cute daughter, a major attraction in the *kampung*. Whenever he invited us home to help his wife grate hundreds of coconuts to be converted into coconut oil, there was never a shortage of willing volunteers, including myself. We gallantly reported to his home for the exercise. In fact, all pupils, except those who were really young, were willing to contribute their sweat to serve the Qur'an teacher. Apart from an eyeful of the pretty girl, we got to take home a can full of oil dregs.

Tok Guru Ismail was replaced by Sheikh Daud, a refined gentleman, but with a pair of penetrating observant eyes that made us avoid his gaze. These two religious teachers were worlds apart, like the Malay proverb "as far apart as the earth and the sky." Sheikh Daud was dead serious, never once joked with us and suffered from no weakness whatsoever. But slowly, with the flow of Matang community activities and amidst our loud reciting of Qur'anic verses, his walls weakened and soon, came tumbling

down. He too became a soccer addict. Our Qur'an School tradition lived on. No matter how minor the game, we were let out early to attend it.

After completing Standard IV at the Matang Malay School, I was sent to an English school, the King Edward VII School, for a Special Malay Class scheme introduced by the British for Malay pupils. My religious classes were affected as I was only free on weekends. My mother, who strongly believed that every good Muslim must complete reading the Qur'an at least once in his lifetime, sent me to continue my lessons with a Matang mosque official, Haji Mohd Ali, at his house in Tebing Tinggi. He was the one who had bailed me out of the Matang Police Station after I was caught taking a bath at a public tap.

As his house was a quarter of a mile from a road, he had to walk through a small snaking path that barely existed. After a downpour, it had hundreds of muddy pot-holes. No bicycle could get through. Even on foot, one could very easily slip and fall on the uneven track. I often wondered how he made his way in and out to attend to his duties in unblemished starched clothes. No one in Matang, except for Headmaster Hashim, was comparable. The only difference was that he wore a starched white coat while Headmaster Hashim wore a khaki coat.

With mixed feelings, both of love for my mother, and of fear for not fulfilling one of Allah's commands, I plodded on until I completed the thirty chapters of the Qur'an. At a special feast to mark the completion of the reading of the Qur'an, my mother beamed as she witnessed yet another of her ten children complete one of the innumerable tasks expected of a God-fearing Muslim.

Note

1. By 2004, however, the school was reduced to a dilapidated shell of a building overtaken by wild vegetation.

Circumcision Ceremony (1921)

Together with my older brother Alli, younger brother Yahaya and an older cousin, I went through the intense experience of circumcision, which was accompanied by much fanfare. Even now, parents still fuss over their teenage boys at the threshold of manhood, albeit to a significantly lesser extent. Although circumcision was a traumatic experience, we put on a brave front. There was no other choice.

Our circumcision ceremony, like most ceremonies then, was held after a grand graduation feast to mark our completion of thirty chapters of the Qur'an, a moment every Muslim was proud of. Shortly after this graduation ceremony, where we recited verses from the Qur'an to demonstrate our fluency and prowess, we were feted with delicious food, such as *pulut kuning* (yellow-coloured glutinous rice), egg omelette, beef curry and *rendang ayam* (seasoned chicken cooked in coconut milk until dry), pickled vegetables, *dhal* curry and fruits. These dishes were specially prepared for the double occasion.

Relatives, neighbours and friends joined in the festivities. We sat cross-legged on the floor, around food placed on huge trays, each of which easily fed four persons. The meals were served on white poplin tablecloths embroidered by my mother. As we ate with whatever appetite we could muster on the dreaded day, my aunt Mak Endak Mariam told us, "Eat to your heart's content. After the circumcision, you will have to lay off certain food, such as meat and eggs for a while, or else the wound will take longer to heal."

After the feast, we were asked to play in the yard to while away the time until 2.00 pm, when the procedure would be performed by the Tok Mudim, the circumcision expert. This chosen time, after the afternoon prayer, was said to be ideal as the wound would then bleed less. I don't know how valid that reasoning was!

I remember clearly that as I played, I rode my bicycle as if it was the last ride of my life, as if I was doomed and about to face a death

sentence. The emotions running through our minds were probably like those of men waiting to die.

Several years before the ordeal, we had been advised by the veterans among our friends, older boys who had already been circumcised, to do certain things in preparation for the awful day. One was to learn to loosen the foreskin from the shaft as often as possible so that the circumcision would be less painful. We were warned that in cases where the foreskin was still tight, the Tok Mudim would have to slit the foreskin lengthwise in several places, before cutting off the foreskin. Fearing this painful possibility, I painstakingly did as I had been advised.

About an hour before the circumcision, we were sent to the bathroom to thoroughly clean our private parts and to take a bath, which was essential to the success of the operation. We were made to squat in a large container of water for a very long time until our private parts shrunk beyond recognition and view.

As I shivered in the water, with tension mounting in my withered groin, I wondered why was it so difficult being Malay? So many tests were expected of us! Yet, as far as I knew, no Malay male had refused to undergo this ritual or had managed to escape this exercise. At that time, I did not know that circumcision was not a must in Islam.

We were then called from the bathroom, one by one, beginning with the oldest (my brother Alli), followed by my cousin, then me, and finally, my younger brother Yahaya. My turn came all too soon. As I shivered, this time more from fear than from the cold, my sarong was whisked away by someone. I was then instructed to sit astride a banana tree trunk that lay on the wooden floor. Another person held my chin upward so that I could not look down and take a peek at the operation.

I felt as if my foreskin was pinched by something and pinned down to the banana trunk. Then, I felt something cut my foreskin. I don't know what instrument it was. It could have been a pair of scissors, a razor blade or a bamboo knife. Tok Mudim then wrapped my cut quickly with a cloth, followed by the chanting of some mantras, which he claimed would reduce the bleeding.

I was then asked to go to a corner of the house where a row of four single mattresses had been placed. I instinctively knew that mattress number three was for me. Without anyone having to tell me, I knew to pull my sarong away from me, as I walked, so that it would not touch the wounded organ. We lay down on our mattresses and began to compare notes on our recently completed ritual.

We put on a brave front as there were many relatives, friends and neighbours around us. But our minds were focused on one and only one

thing, to make sure our ‘most precious asset’ would heal well. After the initial shock, I began to feel pain, which later intensified to excruciating levels. Upon hearing a few of us crying and sobbing, the elders came to console us with nothing more than words of sympathy.

“It’s all right. That pain is due to the cut. You’ll be all right soon,” they said with great compassion.

Nowadays, boys are luckier; there are painkillers and other soothing lotions. We did not even have any lotion or ointment that could help prevent the wounds from turning septic. The Tok Mudim had not left us with anything to reduce the pain.

There was, however, a traditional medicine, a very fine powder obtained from the branches of young coconut palms. This we put on our wounds to speed up healing. My father also brought home blotting paper from the office. Torn into two-inch squares, the blotting paper was used to clean our wounds, to absorb blood and pus. It replaced cotton wool, which was either unavailable or was unaffordable.

We were forbidden from eating any meat or eggs. We were permitted to only eat fish cooked in a bland sauce and a certain variety of fried dried fish not considered detrimental to the healing process.

My main problem was that this ‘prized asset’ of mine was always ‘stretching’ itself, as if taking a look at what was happening around it. This made me scream in pain. I whispered to my oldest brother Ahmed about this ‘rising’ problem, to which he responded, “Oh, that problem! It can be easily dealt with.”

He disappeared to the back of the house for a while and returned with half a coconut shell that had been scraped clean and smoothed. He handed the coconut shell together with a tip: “When ‘the thing’ begins ‘to rise’, use this shell to knock your kneecap. Keep knocking on your kneecap until ‘the thing’ goes down again.”

It was a most effective tip. I thought I was the only one experiencing such a problem, but soon, I began to hear ‘tok, tok, tok’ tapping sounds coming from all the other three suffering my fate. I knew then that we were reacting naturally to the challenges of male adulthood. The still of the night was soon broken by the ‘tok, tok, tok’ sound, like that of the woodpecker which used to perch outside our verandah window.

When I was still far from fully healed and school was about to reopen, my brother brought home a lotion that was smeared on my wound. Soon, it began to heal properly and new skin began to show. The elders came to my bedside to assure me, “Not too long from now, you can return to school. Then, you may eat whatever you like.”

While we were lying down on our own allotted mattresses, sometimes

all day and all night, time passed so slowly, like the hands of the wall-clock, especially in the afternoons. We were not even allowed to play indoor games such as *chongkak* (a game played with an oval block of wood with holes in it and cowries) and meadow-ant fights. As soon as we were about to play, my aunt Mak Endak Mariam, who was a bit of a busybody, would warn us, “Don’t. You will not heal quickly if you move too much.”

Bored almost to tears, my eyes began to roam around the house, looking for something more to read. I had already read my school textbooks many times over during that convalescence. My brother’s favourite books, about the exciting exploits of Buffalo Bill and Sexton Blake, were too difficult for me, as I had just entered the first year of the Special Malay Class.

My eyes fell on a rack that stored some of my father’s collection of books which I had not inspected before. I hobbled to the rack, groaning under books of various thickness, in the three languages my father spoke – Malay, English and Arabic. Some were in tatters, but my father, who loved books with all his heart, kept every single one of them. In those days, books were so expensive that in most homes, there were no books except a couple of textbooks. But my father believed that the value price of a book lay in its content.

I chose a book that looked a little better than the rest of the lot on the shelf. What a treasure!

After looking the book over, opening several pages and scanning its content, I realised that it was about a king, called Raja Hondok. Its pages were of rough paper, had been yellowed by age, and the script was *Jawi* (Malay in Arabic script). The most noticeable difference between this book and others I had seen before was the blank space running all the way down the middle of every page. And stranger still, all the words at the end of the lines rhymed perfectly.

I then discovered that this book was written in the Malay classical style called *syair* – stories related in verse form using quatrains of a rhyme. I recalled where I had heard this kind of book being read, i.e. under the dilapidated shed by the Larut River. This shed was the ‘factory’ that produced the *attaps* sold in many places in the state of Perak. This particular factory closed down some time after the advent of corrugated zinc sheets and tiles.

In those days at the shed were a group of women weaving *attap* thatched roofing from *nipah* palm leaves. *Nipah* had been used on all traditional Malay houses before the advent of corrugated zinc sheets and tiles. I remember listening avidly to the leader of the group, a man, reading

the *syair* in an enchanting sing-song manner. His audience, the women in the group, listened attentively as their fingers weaved the *nipah* palm leaves onto frames as fast as a machine could, completing several pieces in just minutes.

The *syairs* I had heard were always about rich kings, princes and princesses clad in the finest of fineries and living in magnificent palaces. Were these poor women listening to the stories of opulent royal lifestyles not envious? I could not tell. As they were women, and not supposed to laugh aloud, they simpered and giggled at some amusing points in the story. The Malays describe this as 'laughing from the inside'. Over and above the hypnotic sounds of the rhymes and the giggles of the women, came the soothing sound of rushing river water. As the cool breeze caressed their faces, the women worked non-stop, all day.

The last of the *attap* weavers of my childhood days has just died. Interestingly, the best *attap* dealer in Matang was a blind man called Tutik. After buying the *attaps*, he would transport them to the main town of Taiping in a bullock cart, while sitting comfortably atop the *attap* bundles. He was a special person as he could melodiously play the *awai*, a traditional instrument. He died in 1973.

Going back to the *Raja Hondok* book that I had discovered on the rack, after reading a few pages aloud, I was able to read it in the same sing-song manner, just like that man under the shed by the river. After reading carefully, while singing aloud, looking for the story line, I realised that this *syair* was also about a powerful Sultan living in a fabulous palace, with a very handsome prince and a princess too beautiful for words.

And so, during my recuperation from the circumcision, I read several classical Malay books, such as *Siti Zubaidah*, *Nabi Yusoff* and *Faridah Hanum*. As these books were graced with some romantic moments, I had to resort to using the coconut shell more often and the sound of 'tok, tok, tok' continued late into the night.

Finally, much to my relief, with the help of Western medication, my wound healed completely. When school reopened, I was able to go, but my aunt kept reminding me not to be too active and boisterous, or I could suffer a relapse. I excused myself from physical education lessons for several weeks and some foods were still forbidden. Two months after this unforgettable event in my life, I was finally allowed to run and cycle as hard as I wanted.

Among the pupils in my Special Malay Class, were some 'young men'. There were four who were so mature and old that our teacher advised them to look for employment as lorry attendants or something

along those lines. One of these older boys approached me after hearing that I had been circumcised during the school holidays. He asked if I had kept the snipped foreskin.

I replied “No,” wondering what that question was all about.

“You are stupid! That is the best medicine (aphrodisiac) one can have!”

It seemed that if the foreskin were kept in a little coconut oil, the mixture would make a mighty strong aphrodisiac.

Then, he asked, “When are you going to *sepuh* (plate) it (my asset)?”

I responded, “What is *sepuh*?”

He whispered to my inexperienced ears, “Go ‘there’. Bring some money!”

The puzzled look on my face made him add, “A new ‘machete’ will only remain sharp if it is ‘plated’. Even old machetes, once ‘re-plated’, would be sharp again.”

But I was still a little boy, and I did not dare take up on his advice even though it was given in good faith.

I later learnt that the place he had asked me to visit was a brothel. There were many along Boon Bee Street, which featured Japanese women licensed and ‘taken care’ of by the Health Department. The usual charge for services rendered was one dollar. These brothels disappeared after a world conference on prostitution in Paris.

The other place my friend recommended was along Jalan Tupai, where its multiracial occupants charged the same amount as the Japanese women, but were neither licensed nor ‘taken care of’ by any health authorities.

King Edward VII School, Taiping (1921-28)

As I had written earlier, in 1921, after completing Standard IV and passing a special examination at the Matang Malay School, I was admitted into what was called the Special Malay Class (SMC) at the King Edward VII School in Taiping. It marked, at the age of eleven, my transition from Malay to English medium education.

The SMC was a British Government experiment, supposedly to benefit pupils from Malay schools, who had not had any English-language education. SMC was purportedly equivalent to the Standard I of an English school, but how could that be when (mainly non-Malay) pupils, who joined English schools from the outset, had already benefited from three years of English education (Primary C, B and A) before entering Standard I? The British Government did not seem to encourage Malay pupils to begin schooling in the English medium.

In the absence of public road transport, Matang boys who attended the two English schools in Taiping (King Edward VII School and St George's Institution) went to class by riding the Port Weld-Taiping train. This was the first railway track in Malaya, constructed in 1885 to carry tin from Taiping to Port Weld. This early morning train transported not only us schoolboys but also tons of ugly, mangled mangrove to feed the furnaces of the train and countless tin mines in Taiping.

Every single school day, my brothers and I were awakened at the ungodly hour of 4.30 am. After a freezing cold water bath (hot water facilities were unheard of), we hurried through a Malay breakfast of fried rice, fried noodles or banana dumplings. Next, we slipped on canvas shoes (one had to wear shoes to attend English schools) and slung our worn satchels – sewn by my mother from canvas – across our chests.

In the dewy and frigid cold of dawn, we bid goodbye to our devoted mother who walked with us to the small bridge made of coconut palm trunks that crossed the huge drain in front of our yard. We then began to trudge, and sometimes run if we were late, to the Matang Road Train Station, two miles away. Most times, only my brothers and I ran in a pack,

but at other times, other groups of boys, including Chinese and Indian boys, joined us.

Once we were a little late. Despite skipping our usual routine of bath and breakfast, we had to run. My oldest brother Ahmed helped to lug my bag as I, just turned eleven, was finding great difficulty in keeping up with their longer strides. I remember that as a result of running hard on a chilly morning, mucous from my nostrils trailed down my lips and chin on to my clothes.

To our chagrin, we missed the train. Rather than return home and miss a day of school, we decided to walk the six miles along the rail track that ran straight as a pole to Taiping. That morning, we walked almost nine miles to school. Once there, I hurried to my classroom, but before I could open my mouth to explain, my class teacher asked, "Mustapha, why are you late?"

Still panting for my breath, I responded, "We missed the train, Sir. I am sorry."

He did not say anything; his expression was blank. But the moment he took a step in the direction of his *almeira* (large cupboard), I shuddered. We all knew what was kept in the cupboard. He took out a fine cane with multiple split ends, whizzed it in the air, asked me to hold my palms out, and caned me. To this day, I detest this teacher for his heartlessness.

For all we know, the train could have left earlier than usual. And he did not even care to know that we had trudged over eight miles, precariously crossing a couple of swollen rivers using the rail tracks. If we were not careful, we could have slipped and fallen into the rushing water! None of us could swim.

Hefty and curly-haired Mr Raja Ratnam was known for his explosive temper and short fuse. He had an extraordinarily broad chest that a pupil once wittily suggested, "One can dry paddy grains on his chest." His favourite method of punishing us was to rap our heads with his knuckles, or worse, to pinch our tummies. That was extremely painful. But credit must be given where it is due; Mr Raja Ratnam was a diligent teacher.

In the Special Malay Class, there were students of marriageable age. Among them, a few were so slow that Mr Raja Ratnam suggested they leave school to look for menial jobs. They later dropped out of Standard III or IV, but managed to secure low grade civil service positions.

My first day at the English school was busily spent exploring. I saw, for the first time, lady teachers wearing lacy Western dresses, pretty high-heeled shoes and wide-brimmed straw hats. One of them carried a parasol with frilled edgings. But I noticed straight away that there was not a single Malay teacher, male or female.

Underneath the school's wooden stairs was a storeroom where real guns, not the wooden make-believe ones of my former Malay school, were kept. When during recess, I saw boys playing marbles and spinning tops, I planned to bring mine the next day.

My brother told me that a plate of Indian noodles cost four cents. So, on the first day, I bought a plate, to which I added other accompaniments such as boiled potatoes, fried soy bean cake and prawn crackers. Several days later, I found out that four cents was the price of plain noodles alone. I did not mean to cheat or become one of the boys who did not pay after eating. Later, my oldest brother opened an account with the Indian-Muslim noodle vendor, for all of us brothers, which we settled at the end of each month.

There was an interesting assortment of food: *rojak* (cut fruits and vegetables in a spicy sauce), ice cream, sweetened ice water, *bubur kacang* (green-bean porridge), *bubur gandum* (wheat grain porridge), *satay* (grilled skewered meat) which only the well-off pupils could afford, fried tit-bits and fruits. With the ten cents pocket money mother gave each of us, we ate well.

Besides that, my mother stocked us up with sweet-cakes, Malay pancakes, banana dumplings, fried noodles and fried rice. This was because we spent almost all our daylight hours away from home. Each day, we left home at 5.30 am, walked two miles to the Matang Road Train Station, rode the train six miles to the Taiping Railway Station, from where we walked another mile to get to school before 7.30 am.

School ended at 1.30 pm, but the return Taiping-Port Weld train only left at 5.30 pm. So, after the time taken to walk home later on, we only got home at about 7.00 pm. The ten cents pocket money and extra food my mother prepared were to keep us going from the crack of dawn to dusk.

Between school closing at 1.30 pm and the train ride home at 5.30 pm, we spent some time doing our homework under one of the many shady rain trees in the school compound. After that, we either played ball or wandered all over Taiping. Sometimes, we brought salt to eat with young tamarind fruits we stole from trees at the Lake Gardens. The large-bellied Sikh guard at the Lake Gardens suffered from advanced hernia, and we often teased him into chasing us, but he never did.

We usually played soccer or rounders at one of three different fields. There was the circus field and the field in front of the government building, but our favourite was the unkempt one in front of the hospital, because it was just across the street from the train station. One afternoon, my father caught me playing rounders at our favourite field. He called me and asked point-blank, "Do you want to be caned here or at home?"

I answered with certainty, "At home." I stopped playing immediately and my body ran hot and cold intermittently until I got home at 7.00 pm. I don't remember if I was caned or not. But I remember my father telling me how disappointed he was at not finding me leaning against some tree with a book in hand.

On another occasion, while playing football for the school's Raja House, the champion House that year, I saw an unmistakable, well-groomed figure just beyond the fence. It was my handsome father in his three-buttoned white coat. His brother was with him. They both saw me. All at once, the intermittent hot and cold feeling surged in my body and my game suffered. But strangely, I was not caned when I got home. Perhaps my father's brother had advised him not to be so hard on me, or did the yellow sash bearing 'Raja House' that I wore across my chest legalise my game? I will never know.

Double Promotion to Standard III (1922)

Due to our sterling examination results during our first year at the English school, two of my classmates and I were promoted straight to Standard III, in what was called a double promotion exercise.

Our Standard III teacher, Miss Janz, was a Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) who could not speak a word of Malay to save her life. So, for those of us who came from Malay schools, even though we were very good at mathematics, geography and history, we felt like a fish out of water when it came to English grammar lessons. As a result, hilariously silly mistakes were made. One was when my wily friend confidently answered, "My father is a rubber man," when asked what his father did for a living. His father was a rubber tapper.

It was unfair for Miss Janz to expect us to know as much English as the non-Malay boys, who had, by then, studied English for five years. We had only done one year. She was quick to recommend to the Headmaster that my two friends, who lagged behind, be sent back where 'they belonged'. But the kindly British Headmaster did not take up her suggestion. Luckily for me, my brother Ahmed, an excellent student in a higher class, gave me English lessons at home.

Standard IV

A year later, I was promoted to Standard IV, where I had an almost inhumane teacher. On the very first day of class, he had already intimidated us by proudly exhibiting his 'impressive' cane collection. This teacher

forced his pupils to take tuition at \$10 a month, not to help us, but to fatten his wallet and to remit more money to his homeland. We were the victims of his greed.

A man who was interested in pottery, he sent us running in the hot sun during recess to collect clay from disused mining pools a mile away. That meant no food for us. We were then asked to model the clay into our own creations. Those without talent were caned mercilessly. Some pupils took their clay home so their fathers could help. A particular pupil always brought back beautiful pieces that his father, a Taiping Museum staff member, created. Pretty ones were kept in the teacher's *almeira*. Less talented boys had to do theirs a hundred times over. Some even paid others to help out.

Another source of income for this teacher was our pocket money. Pupils who did poorly in tests were caned in class, while clever ones with high marks 'paid' in another way. We had to pay 10 cents to buy a stamp with the word 'Excellent' on it. These stamps were then affixed onto our test papers accompanied by a few remarks. The ten cents charged for one 'Excellent' stamp could buy hundreds of such stamps, I am sure!

His cruel and heartless treatment was justly rewarded. Some older lads waylaid him, bashed him with a stick, and threw rotten eggs at his head. I was told that after his retirement, a lady from a neighbouring country cheated him.

Standard V

In Standard V, we had a teacher whose ego was bigger than his deflating muscles. He was a former boxer, but I dare say his days were over. We always had to flatter him. For example, if he asked us, "Am I slim, plump or fat?" we had to choose the right answer, which was plump. Once, he took off his clothes to exhibit his muscles to us puny pupils. I was made to measure his chest, calf and biceps while he was only wearing his underwear. Headmaster McLeod happened to pass by the class while I was measuring his biceps. I have long wondered if the Headmaster ever called him up.

This was the teacher who caned me after I had walked almost nine miles to school to arrive late. He was also the one who openly demonstrated his hatred for Malay pupils, especially those receiving monthly scholarships of \$10 each. Each time he raised his cane to trash these boys, he would say with wounding sarcasm, "The Malay boys are being 'swerped'." I did not catch his meaning initially, but later on, I realised that 'swerped' sounded like *suap*, a Malay word for 'hand feed'. In

other words, he was saying that Malay boys were being fed on a silver platter.

Was he blind? Did he not see how wretchedly poor the Malay boys were? Their families were living from hand to mouth. Without the \$10, they could not afford to attend school. I knew a friend from Jebong who climbed hundreds of coconut trees every weekend just to earn enough to pay his train fare to school. Unless one of us shared our food with him, he often went hungry. Some weekends, he could not earn enough to pay his train fare for the following week. Was it fair to cane him and accuse him of 'playing truant'?

These Malay pupils were already suffering from the extreme heart-wrenching humiliation only poor people know. Why should they be despised for receiving scholarships that they sorely needed? Fifty years ago, politics was already evident in English schools. Throughout the years, I have kept these scenes locked in my mind and heart.

Standard VI (1925), VII (1926) and VIII (Junior Cambridge) (1927)

My time in Standard VI, VII and VIII went well. I was beginning to get outstanding British teachers, not English-speaking citizens from other countries. These British educators were fair and just, in and out of class. The only problem was that I had to join the cadet corps, learn to box, play the bugle and participate in cricket and soccer. All I wanted was to participate actively in the literary and debating society. I must therefore admit that I was no champ at any sport although I knew how to play almost every game.

Standard IX (Senior Cambridge Class) in 1928

Knowing my father's heavy financial responsibilities to support our education, especially after his retirement in 1925, I decided to leave school while still in the Senior Cambridge Certificate examination class. Using a form given by my friend Moin and without my father's knowledge, I applied for the position of Malay Apprentice in the Department of Agriculture in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. When my father found a carbon copy of my application letter, he beat me up; he was extremely upset as he had planned to send me to medical school.

I explained that I had made the decision to give my older brother, Alli (also in my class) and two younger brothers, Osman and Yusuf better opportunities. I was confused. Was my brotherly sacrifice negative and disobedient?

My father's attitude softened after my mother coaxed him to be more understanding. Even though he refused to admit he was wrong in beating me, he indirectly gave me his blessings when he uttered some encouraging words as I laboured on an onion patch in our backyard.

A fortnight later, a response from Kuala Lumpur arrived, requesting documents, including a testimonial, from my school. As my school Headmaster was holidaying on Maxwell Hills (now Larut Hills), I approached Mr Alexander Keir, Inspector of Schools. He sympathised with me and asked my Headmaster to return to Taiping to expedite my request.

Mr Keir tried to dissuade me from leaving school, saying that I was a brilliant student with an extremely bright future. I explained that my father, whom he knew (they had both once owned horse buggies), was now a pensioner, and had to support many children in school. Unlike most parents of that time, who kept their daughters at home, my father had also sent my sisters to a Malay school. They were probably the only girls in our *kampung* who went to school. Warm-hearted Mr Keir offered me a monthly \$10 scholarship, but I declined and suggested that he be so kind as to offer it to my brother Alli. Soon after, Alli began receiving the scholarship.

My Headmaster, furious to be called back from his holiday, gave me a school-leaving certificate. I tried to explain that I only wanted a testimonial as I planned to return to school if I failed to gain the apprentice position, but he remained adamant.

I walked out of my alma mater with a heavy heart. As it was the school holidays, the compound was silent and deserted. Even the luxuriant leaves of the ancient rain trees, whose benevolent shade I used to sit under while enjoying my green-bean porridge, were motionless. Sadly, I bade farewell to my 'mother'. The only person who saw me walk out with my head bowed, through the huge black wrought iron gate with 'King Edward VII School' proudly engraved on it, was the Chinese ice-cream vendor, who was as old as the school.

I have visited my school many times since, and many delightful memories came flooding back of many a day happily spent within that compound. I hope my school will continue to fulfil its task of producing students who would become responsible citizens of my beloved motherland.

Outside School: Sheikh Hassan, Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Feudalism

My father Hussain was deeply moved by editorials and articles in the few Malay newspapers at that time which coaxed Malays to take bold steps into the world of business and commerce. According to these newspapers, it was time the Malays started to grab the economic opportunities offered by the motherland, to act fast and venture out before all opportunities were taken by others (non-Malays and white men).

Each evening, my pensive father paced up and down, from the lounge to the kitchen, with his hands behind him, muttering with great conviction, “The Malays must begin to venture into business and commerce. If not, we will drown!”

My mother was weary of hearing this, but she kept quiet. This was, she thought, just another of my father’s many ideas, of which he had a bottomless well. Sooner or later, Father would tire of it, she told herself. Wasn’t it Father who once had this brilliant idea of making soap out of coconut oil? My brothers and I were the ones who suffered. We carried tons of firewood, grated hundreds of coconuts, and spent long, hot hours toiling over a gigantic outdoor firewood stove!

After that, we cycled for miles, with huge kerosene cans of home-produced coconut oil perched on our bicycles, careful not to spill their contents, to the house of a limping Arab who claimed he knew how to make soap out of coconut oil. I saw no soap or any other product that materialised.

In those days, Malay parents coveted civil service positions for their sons, especially elevated positions, such as Assistant District Officers (ADOs) or Settlement Officers (SOs). Settlement Officers were referred to as ‘Kings of the Land’. Civil Service positions were the ‘earth and the sun’. No discussions among Malay parents ever involved business or commerce. Perhaps that was why my father decided to introduce one or two of his sons to the intriguing world of business, to carve a path into the economic labyrinth that the world of business seemed to be.

Convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Malays must 'go into business to prosper' and to answer the recurrent calls made by Malay newspapers, he assigned me as an assistant to his Arab trader friend, Sheikh Hassan. The location: Changkat Jering Sunday Market, seven miles from Taiping.

At 6.00 am every Sunday, Sheikh Hassan and I pedalled our old bicycles to the Sunday Market, balancing several white cloth bundles on our back carriers. By 7.00 am, we had already set up a small makeshift stall on our regular spot. On the dirt ground, we spread a large tarpaulin sheet, on which we displayed Qur'ans, religious books, rosary beads and classical style *syair* storybooks in a most appealing way. The slightly romantic *Faridah Hanum* story was the most saleable item. *Batik* from Indonesia, *pulaikat* sarongs from India, prayer mats and colourful shawls from Mecca were hung on the walls of the stall.

Business was booming as the price of rubber was high and Malays craved items related to the Holy Land of Mecca or any Arab land. After all, Prophet Mohammed *s.a.w.* was from that part of the world. We closed shop at noon. After packing the remaining items on to our bicycles, Sheikh Hassan gave me 50 cents and lunch at a Malay shop. That shop is no longer there, an example of yet another one to have folded. This time, it was the owner's mistake. He had sent all his children to English schools after which they all chose Government jobs, including my friend, the owner's fourth son Yahaya, who became a 'dresser' (health assistant).

Perhaps we should emulate Chinese businessmen; however bright their children were, they would send one of them to a vernacular (Chinese) school, and it was this son who would inherit the family business and carry on the family tradition, regardless of whether the business was big or small.

First Exposure to Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Feudalism

Burly Sheikh Hassan, with all his bundles, big and small, spent nights at my house. He once regaled us with a story of how he evaded paying taxes on his merchandise. This he did by declaring that 'all' his bundles contained Qur'ans, which were truly part of his merchandise. No Muslim Custom Officer would dare inspect his bundles without ablution. So, Sheikh Hassan left the checkpoint with a big smile.

My mosquito net had countless mended spots. On nights I could not sleep, I did not count sheep; I counted the spots my mother had mended with care. From within the mosquito net, I could hear my father's conversation with Sheikh Hassan drone into the night.

One night, I had unintentionally left a traced portrait of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the famed Turkish fighter, on our coffee table. In the dim kerosene-lamp light, the two men did not realise it was a tracing. When I went to collect it, they both praised me sky-high for my talent at sketching. I did not know what to do except to slowly creep back into bed.

That piece of art sparked a long discussion between Sheikh Hassan and my father, about how this fearless Turk had struggled against the Turkish monarchy and how he had successfully rid his homeland of a race supported by other Europeans. In that manner, he had cleansed Turkey of the colonial grip.

At other times, Sheikh Hassan described the Arab struggle against French colonialists, especially about the Algerian Abdul Karim who craftily outmanoeuvred French troops. He told tales of how Arab fighters had disappeared ‘like dew at sunrise’ only to reappear to surround French forts, one after another, leaving the occupants with two choices, either to surrender or to perish in hunger. These stories, like those of local Malay warriors, influenced my thinking and coloured my soul intensely.

In addition to making me turbaned Sheikh Hassan’s assistant, my father set up a small sundry store underneath our house, to teach me and my brothers the basic principles of business: how to use the *daching* (a weighing instrument made up of a graduated rod, a pan and a weight), how to measure rice in *chupak* and *gantang*, how to wrap items in used newspapers and how to keep accounts of sales.

To teach us the names of items in Chinese and Tamil, he bought a huge logbook. One of us would write the item sold in English, while another brother wrote its equivalent in Tamil and another in Chinese. When we did not know a word, our father would take the trouble to ask his own office mates.

My mother considered the sundry store an unnecessary burden on our young minds, especially when the school syllabus became increasingly demanding. To our relief, it was closed after a year. But later on in my life, all the rudiments of running the shop as a teenager helped me earn a livelihood. Friends and acquaintances asked me inquisitively, “You were a government servant, where did you learn to do business?”

My father only believed in hobbies which he said would “make use of our brain power” such as reading and writing. As long as I can remember, until he was too old to see clearly (he died at the ripe old age of 90, unusual for Asians), he kept compiling a personally scribed dictionary. He would cut several exercise books (thick logbooks were expensive) into two and compile them into a thick book the size of an adult hand. The pages were then divided into three columns: one for the word in English, followed by Arabic, and then, Malay.

Whenever he came across a word or a phrase he did not know, he would write it down in a fine script (to save space) in the appropriate column. Using this method and with the help of dictionaries, he widened his Arabic and English vocabulary without attending any costly lessons. He had another fine habit – no matter what he read, he underlined words and phrases he did not know and would look them up in the dictionary at the next available opportunity. Another interesting habit was marking his reading material with the dates he had read them.

His fondness for books, reading and learning, was remarkable, especially for that time. During the few times he visited me later on in life, he never tired of asking my children to do their homework in front of him. While my children read or wrote, my father would take the opportunity to read all their textbooks, especially those in geography, history and literature. My children were tired of him telling them to develop “a thirst for knowledge and a hunger for books.” My daughters were advised to take up teaching. This, he said, was the best vocation for women, who, as mothers, could teach their children at home.

What a remarkable father I had. At a time when few parents saw the importance of education and the English language as a medium of progress, we were lucky to have him. In fact, until a couple of months prior to his death, he had a definite morning routine, come rain or shine. Impatient to get hold of a newspaper that would arrive late in Matang, he took a bus daily to Taiping, where he walked half a mile to his friend’s bakery that also sold newspapers. There, at Osman Bakery along Station Road, he read as many newspapers as were available since he could only afford to buy one.

He would continue to read in the bus on the way home, diligently marking words he did not know. After lunch and the afternoon prayer, he read again, this time with a battered dictionary on his lap and a green Parker fountain pen clipped to his top shirt pocket.

Towards the end of his years, I could hear my asthmatic father painfully wheezing away as he read aloud. He said that as one got older, it was easier to understand what one was reading if one heard the words. Some of us in the family have acquired this love for reading and writing, but our passion cannot hold a candle to that of my beloved late father.

Pleasant Childhood Recollections

The way I gained pocket money – by gathering areca nuts, collecting coconuts, tapping rubber, selling mangoes to Sikh policemen and assisting Sheikh Hassan – were invaluable experiences for one so young. It made

me develop a higher degree of confidence, entrepreneurship, thrift, resilience and self-reliance. As tasks and games were mostly accomplished with my brothers and friends, we learned to work as a team and to have trust and faith in one another. Similarly, at school, we competed in the name of the house or the school.

As play items – such as tops, kites, catapults, balls, bats and bird traps – had to be made, we learnt to be resourceful. We also learned fair play and to follow the rules of the game without adult supervision.

During school holidays, we loved to cycle to the waterfalls at the foot of Maxwell Hills and to the Burmese Pool, where we used *upehs* (large dried and curved flower-sheaths of areca nut trees which looked like miniature canoes) to slide down huge boulders, into the clear invigorating water at the bottom of the falls. We brought food like Indian pancakes, *dhal* curry, bread, sardines and fruits. We did not recognise ‘exhaustion’ until we got home.

Sometimes, we cycled eight miles to the foot of Maxwell Hills and trekked another six miles to the peak. There were challenging short cuts through the hill’s jungle slopes, but these were dangerous as pythons lay in wait. It was cool, tranquil and scenic at the peak. The first railway track in Malaya, the Taiping-Port Weld stretch, looked like two straight threads from the peak. In our young and innocent minds, we compared our feelings of achievement with that of Mount Everest climbers, except there was no snow on Maxwell Hills.

As soon as we got home, we slept like logs. The next day, every inch of our body ached. In despair, we swore never to climb the hill again. But three days later, after our mother had relieved the aches and pains with massages, so would go our resolve not to climb the hill again.

Maxwell Hills was developed by a British citizen with vast experience in India of converting hills into scenic resorts. A staple of colonial life-style, hill resorts provided white men their much needed respite from scorching heat, and also acted as convalescent homes for white men serving in tropical climes. It was named Maxwell after Sir William Edward Maxwell, Acting Resident of Perak and later Colonial Secretary and Acting Governor of the Straits Settlements.

In 1883, my granduncle, Datuk Panglima Nakhoda Taruna, a Jebong headman, and his brother, Nakhoda Hassan, were two of the six Malays who accompanied Sir W.E. Maxwell to Acheh (then at war with the Dutch) on a dangerous mission to rescue several Dutch nationals shipwrecked after the horrendous Krakatoa volcanic eruption in 1883.

The developer of Maxwell Hills supervised hundreds of South Indian labourers from atop his horse’s saddle. Gradually, at the insistence of the

Perak Resident, Malay workers were accepted. The British visited the cool and invigorating Maxwell Hills resort, situated 1,250 metres above sea level, on horseback or in sedan chairs shouldered by several Indian labourers. The first paved road to the top was only constructed in 1948. Now, the Indian sedan carriers have been replaced by a four-wheel drive Land Rover driven by an Indian working for the District Office.

Once, I decided to cycle all the 65 miles to Penang island with a friend, Hajar bin Senawi. A meticulously drawn out and detailed plan spelled out where to begin, which route to take, how fast to cycle, places to stop at and the amount of food needed. It was as if we were going on a round-the-world expedition on our bicycles!

Starting at dawn one Saturday, we stopped at two places (Bagan Serai and Sungai Bakap) for food, before arriving at Province Wellesley, from where we took a ferry across to the island. I still remember the lovely, refreshing experience of travelling by ferry, with the cool breeze gently blowing against our faces and the water so tranquil.

Once on the island, we headed towards Kampung Jawa (Javanese Village), my friend's birthplace. At a roundabout, a stern-faced policeman shouted at us, "Stupid fools!" We had gone around the circle in the opposite direction. Well, how were we to know? There was no roundabout in Taiping. We were quite upset, more embarrassed really, with the way the policeman treated us. Didn't he know we were boys from an English school? One wore a boy-scout cap, the other a gurkha cap.

On our second day in Penang, my friend's brother, Puteh Badri bin Chek Mat, who later became an active KMM leader in Penang, took us to the famous Al-Mashoor Arabic School where he taught English. After an introduction to the Arab principal, we were taken to several classes. I was given a chance to speak to a Standard V class in the midst of an English lesson. Choosing the topic 'Composition Writing', I happily lectured away, giving tips on writing, just as I had learned from my teacher in Taiping. The Principal was so impressed that he invited me to dinner at his home that night.

Elders who returned from pilgrimage to Mecca had told us that four Arabs or Turks could consume a whole *kibas* (a type of sheep found in Arabia). I had doubted the truth of such claims. That evening, I learnt otherwise. As we sat on cool, thin quilts on the floor, leaning against sturdy bolsters in a room without furniture, dish after dish of meat, fish, vegetables, seafood, fruit and sweet-cakes were brought in. The main dish was rice cooked in ghee. I had never seen so much food all at one time in all my life. After the third helping, I was bursting at the seams.

I casually leaned against the nearest bolster, trying to look attentive, but fell asleep. My friend's vigorous shaking, with a lot of prodding and

rocking, woke me up. Struggling to focus my mind, I replied, “All right,” at the same time trying to recall where I was.

I apologised profusely to the smiling host. The Arab gentleman kindly replied, “It is all right, son, I know how tired you are after cycling all those miles.” My friend told me that they had had a good guffaw listening to me snoring and spluttering like an out-of-commission outboard motor.

That was one meal I will never forget for as long as I live. Later in life, I often talked to my children and grandchildren about politics and what it should be for – hunger, poverty and suffering – as opposed to its opulent opposites.

As mentioned earlier, my mentally energetic father Hussain had great enthusiasm for business, but with ten children in tow, he dared not resign from his government job to go into it full time. However, he did his bit by helping his friends. I was invariably volunteered, regardless if I was to be paid or not. Perhaps my father had eyes sharp enough to foretell the future, because in the later stages of my life, despite my training and education as a civil servant, I became a businessman. Was it circumstance or fate?

When one of my father’s cousins resigned from his government job to venture into business, as expected, I was assigned to assist him. To purchase his merchandise, this funny and talkative cousin took me on a small steamer from Port Weld to Penang for fifty cents, half the fare of an adult. The journey was exhilarating and the water calm. We stayed in a Penang hotel, which marked my first experience as a guest in a hotel. It was great fun!

The next day, after eating the popular Penang Indian-Muslim rice curry *nasi kandar*, we purchased the merchandise, sarongs of the ‘thousand-threads’ and ‘ball thread’ variety. After an interesting trishaw ride to the jetty, we hopped on to a small grey steamer that left at dusk.

It was a terrifying return journey – a choppy sea, torrential rain and zig-zagging lightning. I soon threw up everything that was in my stomach, including the *nasi kandar*. I ended up flat on the slippery deck, holding on for dear life to the foot of a table stuck to the floor. No one, not even my cousin, came to my rescue. Perhaps they were in a similar perilous situation. Had I not held fast to the table, my life could have ended in the murky waters of Port Weld.

A Bitter Experience

While I was in Standard IV, my brother Ahmed was in the Junior Cambridge class. A Junior Cambridge Certificate holder could get any

government job he wanted, such as that of Health Inspector, Police Inspector, Sanitary Inspector, Settlement Officer and Clerk. But my father wanted my brother to continue his studies at the elite Malay College in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The College was dubbed 'The Eton of Malaya' and was then the only college in Malaya.

My brother would first do his Senior Cambridge year there, after which he could enrol in a course which would entitle him to higher positions in the Malay Administrative Service (MAS), a scheme one rung lower than the Malayan Civil Service (MCS) scheme for white officials. MAS officers could aspire to hold high positions as Magistrates, Deputy Assistant District Officer (DADO) and Assistant District Officer (ADO) in small districts. These were coveted positions for Malays in the civil service.

But my father did not realise that the Malay College was established by the British purely for children of the Malay rulers, royalty, Datuks (chieftains) and a handful of commoners from Negeri Sembilan and Pahang. A Perak pupil would only be accepted if he was of pure Perak descent, with no connection to Java or Sumatra unless he was an adopted son of a Perak chieftain. In short, the Malay College was a school for the Malay aristocracy, and through these collegians, the British colonialists hoped to rule Malaya forever.

Malay College pupils received monthly scholarships according to their social status, with those of higher status receiving more, which was ludicrous. Class I, comprising children of ruling aristocrats, received \$20. Children of non-ruling aristocrats and sons of chieftains, i.e. Class II, received \$12. The commoners, a very small number, received \$7. Once, a thoughtful British educationist had suggested a uniform amount of \$25 for every pupil. But a Malay chieftain had coolly replied, "Why so much, Tuan (Master)? Malays only eat rice and chillies. Just a little will do."

My father sent his cousin, Mohd Hashim bin Datuk Panglima Nakhoda Taruna to see Raja Sir Chulan in Kuala Kangsar to request a recommendation for my brother to attend the prestigious school. Mohd Hashim, a refined gentleman and a renowned Malay scribe, was familiar with all matters pertaining to the court. His father, my granduncle, was Datuk Panglima Nakhoda Taruna.

Wearing a fine *samarinda* sarong from the Celebes, a five-buttoned white coat, a red velvet fez, a pair of shining pump shoes and a pince nez, in short, the clothes of a 'Malay Gentleman', Mohd Hashim called on Raja Sir Chulan with a little token from my father. When he returned, he looked like he had met with a serious accident. I heard him telling my father, "How could he forget that we, like him, come from a very

reputable background? He pretended not to know our heritage! Do we not come from very fine families? Would you believe that he had said, “A ‘C’ is always a ‘C’” (‘C’ referring to a commoner).

But my father did not and would not understand. He insisted, “Our family has the means. I am willing to pay whatever it takes to get Ahmed a place. How come the College accepts sons of commoners from Negeri Sembilan and Pahang, but not my children?”

My father went into a deep gloom for weeks, as if he was the one who had been declined a seat. It was the last straw in his attempt to get my brother Ahmed, a very talented student, into the Malay College.

The Newspapers

My active association with newspapers began when I was just 14, as an errand boy for my father. Every afternoon, he asked me to carry the Malay newspapers he had already read to the Matang Mosque to be read by Muslims in between the five daily prayers. As I mentioned earlier, he felt that reading newspapers was better than aimless chatter. I did that diligently until I was sent home by a religious official who warned, “Tell your father and all his newspaper-fan friends that they are satans.”

After that most unfortunate incident, my father diverted the newspapers to the home of his brother, Tok Ngah Mansor. But before I did that, it was my duty to translate the editorials from Malay into English so that all of us could expand our English vocabulary and improve our command of the language. It was a difficult task, but I did not dare refuse. For this purpose, he bought a very expensive dictionary, but again, to my father, the value of the book lay in its content.

A playful teenager with small powers of concentration, I was initially uninterested in editorials from *Saudara*, *Edaran Zaman* and *Al Ikhwan*, let alone to translate them! But after some weeks, I learned to enjoy its hidden messages and its constructive content so much so that I began to translate them without pulling a long face.

These Malay editorials harped on Malay poverty, backwardness and weaknesses, especially in education, business and economics. They called for more educational opportunities and facilities for Malay youths, and insisted that no others (non-Malays and colonialists) should administer the country. But they were extremely careful not to be too direct; they could not afford to, for fear of closure. Editors often ended their pieces with some kind of declaration of allegiance to the authorities.

From reading and translating these biting editorials, my political consciousness began to grow, first, in my thinking, and then, in my entire

being. I am truly thankful to my father; otherwise, I would have grown up to be a Malay completely blind to Malay politics.

I lost touch with these Malay editorials when I began a three-year Malay apprenticeship at the School of Agriculture. It was only in 1933, when I was 23, that these editorials re-entered my life, stoked my mind, and fired my soul. This was purely accidental. As the School's Hostel Warden, I had one evening casually picked up the Malay dailies, *Warta Malaya*, published in Singapore, and *Majlis*, published in Kuala Lumpur.

To this day, I am addicted to newspapers; I cannot miss them, even for a day; I feel as if I have not eaten for a whole day if I miss it in the morning. Newspapers are my *halwa mental* (mental delicacies).

Leaving the Nest (1928-31)

To apply for the Malay Apprentice position with the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Kuala Lumpur, I mailed all the necessary documents by registered post in March 1928. Having already left school and anticipating a rigorous interview, I started to read more about plants and agriculture. Within weeks, a train warrant ticket arrived, with a letter inviting me to an interview in Kuala Lumpur. After dispatching my application, I was often lost in my private world of daydreams.

This Malay Apprentice position would be my chance to own a motorcycle, preferably a Norton, or at least a BSA. The year before, with instructions drawn on a piece of paper by an older friend, I had learnt to ride a small BSA that belonged to a junior surveyor who rented a room in our house. I was only seventeen; it was a proud moment, my first ride on that heavenly machine! I rode the 'borrowed' BSA, which featured a cylindrical gas tank shaped like a banana tree trunk, all over Matang, as far as Taiping, six miles away. Sometimes, my younger brother Yahaya rode alongside on his bicycle, with his left hand resting on my right shoulder.

Once home, we frantically fanned the engine with a Chinese straw fan to cool it before the owner returned. He only got wind of my 'borrowing' his bike after he no longer stayed at our house. I am glad I had no mishaps, or else I may have had to appear in court a second time. The first time, you may recall, was when I was only twelve, for bathing at a roadside public tap.

Friends told me that Agricultural Officers made good money. A classmate, whose father was an Agricultural Assistant, boasted of his hefty pocket money. Surely, I would be able to own a Norton. I would show it off to my village friends, and village damsels would swoon at the sound of my shining machine!

The Interview and 'Secret Weapon'

Prior to my departure, I had enquired about the location of the DA in Kuala Lumpur. Many advised me that on arrival at the Kuala Lumpur

Railway Station, I should take the road towards the Lake Gardens, where I would find many DA employees wearing DA buttons on their yellow shirts. They would show me the way.

I was lucky because upon arrival at the station, another Malay Apprentice candidate, Mohd Ali bin Abdul Hamid, overheard me asking someone for directions. He introduced himself and we shared a taxi to the interview. Mohd Ali became my bosom friend, and later in life, by arrangement his second son Omar Azaddin, married my second daughter Hendun.

This new friend carried a recommendation letter signed by the Raja Bendahara of Perak, a prince only too willing to sign recommendation letters for his subjects. Sometimes the documents were informally signed on his car bonnet. He later became the Sultan of Perak.

I too had a 'secret weapon', and later discovered many others had brought theirs. I also learned that out of the 45 interviewees, only eight would be chosen, while eight others had already been assured of places.

Our first interviewer was a slender white man with a dark toothbrush moustache and droopy eyebrows. This man, Mr George Ernest Mann, not only would become my Principal for the three-year Malay Apprentice course (1928-31), but was later to become my boss at the School of Agriculture in Serdang (1933-41).

After hastily responding to my polite "Good morning", he asked me to sit on a chair opposite his desk, a regular government-issued model. His first question was, "How many legs does a spider have?" Next, he asked if I played football, and what position. What would I do to get a ball from a much bigger-built opponent? He seemed pleased with all my answers. I was asked to wait outside the room while another interviewee was called in.

Among the nervous candidates in the waiting room was a boy from Melaka, who, on seeing me wearing a necktie, jeered "Like chicken shit!" We almost exchanged a few punches. Funnily enough, he was also selected, and we became close friends during our three years as Malay Apprentices.

The final selection was made at another place at the Department of Agriculture Headquarters. The large interview room had a veranda, with black and white split bamboo blinds. Several white men sat on one side of a long table opposite a solitary chair for the candidate. As I courteously lowered myself on to the chair, I scanned the faces in front of me very quickly. I was relieved to see a familiar face, that of Mr Mann, sitting in the middle.

They rained questions on me. I answered each and every one respectfully. Then, something told me it was time to produce my 'secret weapon',

a parchment, torn and tattered by time and the attack of tropical insects. Written quite legibly were the words:

This document is given by his Excellency the Governor of the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) to Datuk Panglima Nakhoda Taruna, the Penghulu of Jebong, one of the six Malays who accompanied the Honourable William Edward Maxwell on a highly dangerous mission despatched by Her Majesty's Government to demand the release of officers and seamen of the ship 'Nasoru' from the Rajah of Tenom (in Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia). The release of the survivors has been affected and Mr Maxwell values the services rendered by the Malays who accompanied him.

This historical document, dated 11 November 1884, was signed by the Acting Governor and Acting Colonial Secretary, complete with the grand seal of the Governor of the Straits Settlements. We still have a photocopy in our keeping. This letter of appreciation, yellowed by age, was passed from one interviewer to another, down the length of the table, until one of them asked, "Who is this old man?"

I replied with great pride, "My granduncle!"

To that, he responded, "Oh!"

I noticed a marked change in his facial expression, from a stern look to a friendlier demeanour. After some hushed consultations, I saw Mr Mann, secretary of the interview board, make a small tick next to my name on his list. He then told me to return to my *kampung* to wait for a reply. My return trip was more fun as my new-found friend, Mohd Ali, and another boy from Tapah Road, took the same train. We promised to inform each other should we be successful and summoned to Kuala Lumpur.

While waiting for the interview results, I toiled over a small vegetable plot at the back of my house, as if an Agricultural Officer would be inspecting my work at any moment. My mother smiled in amusement. One afternoon, the much-awaited letter arrived, announcing my acceptance as a Malay Apprentice, with a monthly allowance of \$46. Should I accept the offer, I would have to go to Kuala Lumpur with a bicycle (if I had one), a single mattress, bed linen, a mosquito net, work clothes and other basic necessities.

With some money given by my mother, I rushed to Taiping and bought a big bag, several yards of burlap fabric for the mattress, *kapok* (a cotton-like substance) as filling, and netting fabric for the mosquito net. My mother started to stitch the items, with me anxiously looking over her shoulder. While busy preparing, I did not notice any sign of envy on the face of my brother Alli, whom I would soon leave.

Three-year Malay Agricultural Apprentice Course (14 May 1928 – 1 May 1931)

After bidding farewell to my tearful mother, I left Taiping by train. As planned, my friend, Mohd Ali joined me at the Batu Gajah Station, and another friend, Mohd Yusof bin Zainal, got on the coach at Tapah Road Station. We chatted excitedly on the first leg of the adventure after leaving the security and safety of our nests.

Upon arrival at the School of Agriculture, the birthplace of agricultural education in Malaya, we were instructed to go into a row of Class Ten British government quarters. Each unit was a wooden building with a veranda, with two bedrooms in the front and a kitchen at the back. The steps were made of bricks, something to be proud of at that time. Two students were placed in each unit – one a newcomer, the other a second year student. I was to share mine with a fair-skinned Johore boy, Abu Bakar bin Manan. Mohd Ali turned out to be married, and was given a unit all to himself.

The next morning, we were taken to another wooden building, almost a shack, with *nipah*-thatched roofing. This was to be our school! The School of Agriculture was better known as ‘Sekolah Atap’ or the ‘Thatched-roof School’ by everyone, including the white man. It had been opened in 1925, and if I am not mistaken, we were the third intake.

There were three rooms in this shack of a school. First year students were ushered into the first room, equipped with long tables, equally long benches and a huge blackboard. Along one side of the room were water taps and sinks. A chemical balance and a microscope, both securely kept in wooden boxes, stood at the back. I was somewhat ashamed to sit on the long bench. My chair at King Edward VII School had been far superior. The middle room was the office of the Principal and his staff. The last room was a classroom for second year students.

The School’s Principal, Mr Mann, carried a brown leather briefcase with AI MAO – meaning Agricultural Instructor, Malay Agricultural Officer (for the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States) – embossed on it. I found out later that Mr Mann had an MA (Master of Agriculture) from Pembroke College, Cambridge. His assistant, Raja Mahmud, of the Selangor royalty, had graduated from a two-year course at Burma’s Forestry College. The school’s demonstrator, Enchik Din bin Embi, had also completed a two-year agricultural course.

On that first day, we received several exercise books and were told, as a matter of fact, that among the subjects we would be studying were Chemistry, Physics, Botany, Major Crops, Secondary Crops, Entomology

and Translation. In my heart of hearts, I said, “The school may be thatched-roofed, but the syllabus is nothing to sneer at. It was difficult to pronounce the subjects, let alone study them! Good Lord!”

To my greater shock, we were told that more subjects would be added in the second and third years. I became restless. I did not expect to be asked to study that many difficult subjects. We had not even studied general science in school!

All this while, I was under the impression that we would be putting on impressive looking DA uniforms and sent to work riding motorcycles. My heart began to rebel. I felt cheated. What if I was to just leave and apply for another job? I was keen to work, and with a Junior Cambridge qualification, it would be easy to get a job. But where would I go? Where would I live while looking for another job? What would my parents say? I asked myself all these questions. Hadn't my poor mother worked day and night to stitch my mattress, mosquito net and clothes? After some deep thinking, I decided to give it a try.

There were some things that troubled us. Raja Mahmud was an extremely taciturn teacher. And because of some conflict, he and Mr Mann were not on speaking terms. One morning, I heard Mr Mann wishing Raja Mahmud “Good morning”, but Raja Mahmud did not respond. Thinking he had not heard Mr Mann, I said, “Engku, Mr Mann just wished you ‘Good morning.’” He replied firmly, “I put his ‘Good morning’ in my pocket.” Che Din, our hardworking demonstrator, was also a very quiet person.

We did not receive any textbooks, except for one on genetics, in the second year. All lessons involved copying notes. As the lab by the side of the room was minimally equipped, we were given very few practical lessons. Five years later, when I was asked to lecture at the new School of Agriculture in Serdang, I felt this handicap, but I made it up by reading London matriculation level botany books by Percival, some Detmer and Moore books, and some translated German books. By doing my own practical exercises before facing my students, I felt better equipped to be a full-fledged botany teacher.

Field Work

Our major field work project was our vegetable plots. We had a row each on which we could plant whatever vegetables we wished. My sweet potato flourished without much tending, but the water gourd attracted too many pests. I also planted long beans, potatoes and two other crops as a mixed plant experiment.

Field work was ably led by Raja Mahmud, and just as in class, he hardly spoke a word. One student wittily described the situation, “I think he is afraid to open his mouth for fear the gold he keeps in his mouth will tumble out.” So, during breaks at the farm, we chatted among ourselves about things young people talk about. He never once scolded us, but when he was displeased, we could detect a disapproving ‘chet, chet’ from his lips. That was all.

Our final marks depended heavily on our vegetable plots. Some toiled all the time with little success, while others, with green fingers, easily found success. I belonged to the latter category.

Our field trips took us to the Lake Gardens, an oil mill in Kelang, a match factory in Morib, pineapple and coconut plantations, and the world famous Rubber Research Institute (RRI) estates in Sungai Buloh.

The Bean Forgets Its Pod

This is the story of how I almost became an ingrate, ‘the bean that forgot its pod’. In anticipation of the approaching *Hari Raya Haji* (a major Muslim celebration), we received \$23, a half-month advance of our allowance. That was my first allowance.

That evening, two of my acquaintances, former students employed by the Kuala Lumpur DA Headquarters, invited me on a trip to Port Dickson, a popular beach resort seventy miles south of Kuala Lumpur. We rode in a taxi driven by a Thai with a severe crew cut. While travelling, I was asked to operate the gramophone that had been brought along. In Port Dickson, we ate fried noodles at a Japanese-owned restaurant in Teluk Kemang. That was the first time I tasted Ajinomoto (a Japanese brand of monosodium glutamate), a very popular food taste enhancer in Malaysia today.

I was lucky my new friends did not take advantage of me. We split the cost of the trip according to the size of our salaries, so I still had some money left to send home. The next day, like all filial Malay sons, I rushed to the post office to send some money to Matang by registered post. This became a monthly ritual. I would not be able to rest easy until I had put some money in an envelope and posted it to my family.

First Introduction to Politics

While in my third year (1930), Mr V.C. Dawson, a Canadian lecturer with a BSc from McGill, joined the school to assist Mr Mann teach chemistry and physics. A very diligent and serious educator, it took us several months to get used to his North American accent.

One day in class, he asked in a low voice, "Is there a communist among you?"

Standing up boldly to represent the class, I responded, "We are not fools and are not stupid enough to be communists."

To that he asked, "How do we know? Even your uncle may be a communist."

Mr Dawson was saying all this very softly because he did not want Mr Mann, the Principal, a very strict Englishman, to know of such exchanges. On another occasion, I heard a Kedah student, Mahmud bin Osman, shouting at Mr Dawson, "You can go back to your own country!" I did not know what preceding discussion had so angered the Malay student.

I think Mr Dawson was misled. He thought students in Malaya were as politically conscious as students in Canadian colleges. Maybe it did not dawn on him that politics was not one of the subjects as freely discussed in Malaya as it was in Canada, that had already attained Dominion Status in 1867. After getting to know Mr Dawson closely, I learnt that he was a very liberal person who did not believe in colour bars. After that incident with the Kedah student, he stopped talking about politics. Perhaps he had also received an earful from the British officers.

Entertainment

We had opportunities to play soccer on a medium-sized field near the school. We often lost to well-known teams from other schools, but never too badly. Were we to be given a bigger field and more practice, we would have become a team to be reckoned with.

There were also two badminton courts. Abu Bakar bin Manan and I were the inter-house doubles champions. But when we played with the Sunnydale Club, we lost terribly. Sunnydale already had excellent players in 1928. It is no surprise that Malaysia has produced stars like Ng Boon Bee, Tan Yee Khan, Tan Aik Mong and Tan Aik Huang.

For three days after pay-day, the school was deserted. The Indian-Muslim canteen we patronised daily was deserted. Even students who cooked their own meals would be out. The leftover rice in their pots developed a green mould, a kind of fungus suitable as a specimen in class.

On moonlit nights, we took strolls in the Lake Gardens where we sang and plucked our guitars. In this department, the Johore students were incomparable. But when it came to jokes and making people laugh, the Penang boys were the natural champions.

We were divided into groups. Mine was called the ‘Four Musketeers’, with me as the ringleader. The other three members were Abdul Kadir from Melaka, Chik from Penang and Mohammad from Pahang. Mohammad was called ‘Mat Golok’ (Machete Mat) because he carried one wherever he went. We all became good friends during the course, and later on in life, we met occasionally at promotion exercises or agricultural exhibitions.

Abdul Kadir from Melaka

Abdul Kadir was the Melaka boy who had called me ‘chicken shit’ when he saw me wearing a necktie at the interview. He had a slight deformity – three fingers of his left hand were bent and could only be straightened with help.

As Mr Mann was an active Captain in the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF), all Malay Apprentices were forced to join. The small deformity suffered by Abdul Kadir was only known to the other students. When the shooting instructor was teaching the techniques for handling a rifle, poor Kadir could not hold his rifle firmly unless someone helped straighten his three bent fingers.

The British Sergeant shouted “Damn!” loudly at him. As I was next to him and as the ringleader of our group, I tried to explain the problem Kadir had with his fingers. The Sergeant shouted at me, “I did not ask you!” Finally, Kadir was dismissed from the Volunteer Corps. For him, this outcome was better than what he had hoped for.

Unable to enjoy soldiering, especially marching, I searched for ways to get dismissed. I complained of pain in my legs, which was true, as I have always had thick varicose veins. They sent me to a doctor who made me stand on a chair and gave me such a painful injection that my world went black for a few seconds and I almost fell off the chair. But there was no reprieve and I still had to go for drill, so I attended only the compulsory ones.

On one of those non-compulsory drill days, I walked to Kadir’s house to see what he did in his free time. When there was no sign of activity in the house, I peeped through the keyhole. There he was, sitting alone on the floor, his hands busily shuffling a pack of cards. After shuffling, he distributed the cards as if there were three other players with him. He opened his cards ever so carefully and studied them. Then, he looked at the cards of the others, muttering “chih”, as if dissatisfied. After that, he changed seats, as if the next seat would bring better luck.

When he heard the others returning, he quickly packed his cards and opened the door for his roommate, Mohd Yusof bin Nam from Province

Wellesley. That night, I saw Abdul Kadir earnestly inviting his friends to a card game, with him taking the 'lucky' seat, as determined a few hours earlier. I don't know if he won or lost.

This was his major weakness during the three years. When I last saw him at an advanced course in Serdang before World War II, he was still plagued by the habit. I have since helped him financially several times. Once, he openly declared his plan to do something really drastic, but I advised him against it, quoting my own bad fate as an example. My resilience lies in my belief that God will be with those who harbour good intentions and work hard towards their goals.

A Malay Apprentice Imitating the White Man

On pay-day weekends, not a single Malay Apprentice was in the school compound. Everyone was out, dressing and behaving like a white man, painting the town red. On his head, each student would wear an Ellwood helmet bought from the Whiteaways, Laidlaw and Co. Ltd, or a polo hat called the Prince of Wales, ordered from Oxendale and Co. Ltd in London. His shirt, bought from Mohd Yousof and Sons, or Gian Singh & Co. Ltd, with a separate collar starched as stiffly as a book cover, would bear the legend 'Made in England'. The shirt was typically of English white drill or English alpaca.

The necktie would also have a 'Made in England' tag, bought either in Kuala Lumpur or ordered from Leonnards and Co. Ltd in London. His pocket would contain a Pyramid handkerchief. Stockings were invariably labelled 'Pelican 100% woollen', while his shoes came from Abbots, Barrats or Leonnards & Co. Ltd. Most items were ordered through catalogues on a COD basis, and arrived from England 'still smelling of England'. The most expensive pair of shoes then cost 25 shillings, or twelve Malayan dollars.

And where would the Malay Apprentice go to eat and have a good time? Not at common places like Mohd Kassim Restaurant on Batu Road (now Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman), but at places like John's Hotel and exclusive cafes. A second year student would graduate to a more expensive restaurant such as the Colonial Restaurant and the Coliseum Cafe. He would then call the waiter 'boy' and order a Hennessy *stengah* with an English slang. He would not touch rice and chillies, but would only partake of beefsteak, cutlets and toast.

So, on every pay-day, a Malay Apprentice would imitate the ways of his 'master', and roam all over the city on bicycles. (I had a motorcycle for a while.) For this, he had to scrimp the rest of the month, surviving on rice with salted egg, anchovies, sardines and soy sauce.

Whenever a parcel marked COD arrived, the first person a Malay Apprentice would seek was Mr Eliathamby, the Chief Clerk and Pay Master or the Sikh Guard. Both could provide a small loan and both lived within earshot of our quarters.

If I could choose a style now, I would go for the rugged and groovy style. Wearing a helmet, coat, necktie, stiff-collared shirt, thick pants, woollen stockings and such heavy shoes was cumbersome. There was a Malay Apprentice who overdid his 'white man' imitation by carrying a walking stick. We nicknamed him Datuk Kelana (a Bugis noble title).

First Stint in the FMS Volunteer Force

I had no interest in Western-style shows of courage where one would have to accept orders blindly from a superior. So, I was only there for compulsory drills. I despised spending hours shining the belts, buckles and buttons that adorned our uniforms, which consisted of a Gurkha cap, a shirt made of very thick and prickly material most unsuitable for the hot Malayan climate, long khaki shorts, a webbed belt, heavy boots and puttees.

I hated the puttees most. Since I had thin spindly legs, winding the puttees up my calf was a tedious and frustrating exercise. Sometimes, if I did not do it right, it would not reach the calf. At other times, it would overshoot the calf. As a result, I had to do it again and again, each time more problematic than before. It became even worse if I was in a hurry. I can safely say that the winding of the puttees was the most frustrating part of dressing up as a volunteer.

Why did the white man invent puttees, if not to raise the temper of soldiers, who could then be charged with ill discipline? After struggling with the puttees, a volunteer would next sling a bag on his back, and wear a webbing vest with small pockets for bullets. As if this were not enough of a burden, a water container was added to the whole gin bang while a bayonet hung from the belt on our left.

We were taken to the Volunteer High Command in a FMSVF bus. Mr Mann was Captain; D.H. Grist (Editor of the *Malayan Agricultural Journal*) Major; C.D.V. Georgi (Agricultural Officer, Chemistry Division) Adjutant, and B.E. Eaton (Eaton Road was named after him) was Lieutenant Colonel and Commanding Officer. The Selangor Volunteer Force was dominated by Agriculture Department staff.

Their names were spun into two popular jokes: "One fine day, a man named Georgi Porgie asked a very earnest man (G. Ernest Mann) if he had eaten (Eaton)?"

A volunteer would ask, “Why is the artillery not working properly?” The answer: “It would only work well if one applies grease (Grist) to its wheels.”

Once a year, Malay Apprentice Volunteers were taken to the Port Dickson (PD) military camp by train. Upon arrival at the Port Dickson Railway Station, we walked six miles to the camp, a short distance from the beach. I had been there when I was fifteen, as a cadet at the King Edward VII School. Those who had not been to PD would exclaim loudly, “Wow!” when their eyes caught sight of the beautiful sandy beaches.

The military camp then only consisted of one permanent building, while the kitchen, canteen and toilets were temporary constructions. We slept on low single beds under tents. Our rifles were left upright and chained in a row just outside our tents. Everyday, we had to march in those unbearable uniforms. We also had sham-fights using blanks.

In the late afternoons, we made a beeline for the beach to swim. The bayonet that had been idle for so long came to be used, not to kill enemies, but to spear crabs.

Breakfast was very European – two half-boiled eggs and toast with a kind of delicious jam no longer available now. Evening meals consisted of local food from a Hailam Chinese canteen just outside the camp.

At the Port Dickson camp, I completed my emulation of the other volunteers, especially the non-Malay volunteers, when I had my first drink of beer. It tasted and smelled like fermented mango. I wondered what kept people going back for more. I managed to finish a small bottle, after which I felt flushed. Both my ears and face felt as if they had swollen to double their size. When I made my way home alone the ground felt uneven. I then remembered Matang Indians after their toddy sessions. Once inside my tent, I went to sleep despite friends coaxing me to chit-chat. My bed began to spin and I imagined huge fishes swimming around my bed. That was my first encounter with alcohol.

After two weeks at the Port Dickson military camp, we returned to Kuala Lumpur as disciplined soldiers.

Agricultural Assistant: Malay Poverty, *Ganja* and Speed

Blessed with my parents' prayers, I passed my final Department of Agriculture examination with flying colours, entitling me to a higher starting salary and the privilege of choosing the position I most desired. With the dream of owning a magnificent motorcycle still burning brightly in my heart, I chose a position that involved much travel, as an Agricultural Assistant (AA) in the field. Extension work was, without question, more appealing than a job at the Head Office Laboratory.

I was designated Malay Agricultural Assistant II in charge of two districts – as an advisor for the Kinta District and as an instructor for the Batang Padang District. It was the most important AA post in my home state of Perak. I had big shoes to fill. My predecessor was Enchik Tak bin Haji Daud (later Datuk), the late stepfather of the Sultan of Perak (in 2004), considered the best AA in the entire state. British officers fought to employ him and would hold on to him for as long as they could. Yet, his workmates called him 'stupid' for being too diligent, for spending too much time at work, and for carrying bundles of files and lugging his heavy typewriter home at the end of each workday.

May 1, 1931 – my first day at work – remains vivid in my mind even though forty-five years have passed. Soon after disembarking at the Tapah Road Railway Station, I made my way to the Tapah Agricultural Office, my first workplace, located in the same wooden building as the Tapah Health Office.

My first boss, Enchik Ariffin bin Haji Abbas, Deputy Agricultural Officer answerable to the British State Agricultural Officer based in Taiping, was waiting for me. When I wished him, "Good morning, Sir," he gave a small smile that said very little. Good-looking and tall for a Malay, Ariffin was on the heavy side. He was simply dressed in a white short-sleeved cotton shirt, starched khaki pants and a pair of chunky brown shoes. As he silently read my recommendation letter, written by the Chief Field Officer for Malaya, Mr F.W. South, I took the opportunity

to survey his neat, sunny office. A sudden whiff of 4711 Eau de Cologne and a most delicate Santalia-based fragrance floated across my nostrils.

Folding the recommendation letter carefully, he commented, "According to this letter, you are a highly intelligent and capable student." Then, his large clear eyes fell on my fancy white shoes with bold brown stripes. He said pointedly, "Next time, buy shoes like this," with his index finger pointing towards his own unattractive pair. I hastily replied, "Yes, Sir." The next day, I bought a tin of Kiwi brown shoe polish and painted my fancy shoes brown.

Next, he called Notice Server Jamil. After a brief introduction, he instructed Jamil, "Take Enchik Mustapha to... Never mind! Early tomorrow morning, take Enchik Mustapha to Temoh instead. I want both of you there at 7.00 am." I was about to protest that I had not been given a chance to look for a house yet, but had no chance. A large table facing a bustling main road was assigned to me.

I was anxious; whatever furniture I owned was somewhere at the train station. Luckily, Jamil accompanied me to the station, lugged the bits and pieces into a small lorry, and together, we headed towards my brother's friend's house in Tapah town. On the way, I tried to find out more about my new boss by commenting, "Looks like the boss is rather strict. He did not even give me time to look for a place. I am already assigned to do something first thing tomorrow." "That is all right," responded Jamil. "Just wait and see," he added with a lingering smile. When I mentioned the same subject to Enchik Dahalan bin Mohd Salleh, my brother's friend, his reply was about the same as Jamil's. "That is typical of Ariffin. Just wait and see." I therefore waited for this 'wait and see'.

At the crack of dawn the next morning, Jamil and I cycled to Temoh, a small town with just two rows of narrow wooden shop-houses facing each other. Shortly after, Ariffin arrived on a motorcycle too small for its bounteous human load. After assembling the town's shopkeepers – mainly Chinese with a smattering of Indians – Ariffin asked me to give a small lecture, my maiden public lecture.

My first duty as an AA in the Batang Padang District was therefore to share my knowledge on methods to counter the spread of common garden snails in the sleepy town. I pointed out that it was best to kill the snails at night when they came out to feed (during the day, they hid in undergrowth and dumping grounds). The best way to destroy this pest was by dumping them in a pail of hot water; the best prevention method was by clearing undergrowth, enabling the sun's rays to destroy their eggs, while leftover food and vegetables should not be dumped indiscriminately.

Ariffin took a snail, the biggest we could find, and as an experiment, poured some salt inside it. Whitish foam and a small amount of fluid oozed from the snail before it died. I recalled my mother using salt to kill leeches that stuck to our legs after trips to our rubber smallholding. Ariffin later sent a report on his salt experiment to his British boss in Taiping.

Early the second morning, as instructed, Jamil and I were at another designated location, Banir, also by 7.00 am. This time, Ariffin arrived wearing a battered brown crash helmet. My second task was to inspect the Banir Malay School's vegetable farm. It was the British Government's education policy to encourage Malay schools to grow vegetables and simple crops, and to instruct pupils on the rudiments of farming. After inspecting the little vegetable farm, I gave a lecture on plants and botany. I thoroughly enjoyed this experience, but regretted the fact that a shaky time-worn blackboard was the sole teaching aid in the school.

Socially, I tried to befriend the *kampung* folk, but except for a handful, they were bashful. Members of a billiard club welcomed me into their fold, but I was brought up "not to enjoy any kind of gambling." Others offered a welcome to a Bagan Datuk secret society, with 'special benefits' and enjoyment, but I declined.

When I complained to Jamil that my salary was slow in coming, Ariffin gave me \$25 from his petty cash box without any query. Ariffin was not that stiff after all, I thought. Upon receiving the money, I recalled how we Malay Apprentices had borrowed money from Mr Eliathamby at the Agricultural School. He would then deduct the amount we borrowed plus interest from our next pay. He wore a perpetual smile that read, "You are most welcome to borrow again." I had also borrowed money from the Agricultural School's Sikh watchman at a monthly rate of ten per cent interest. Those were the only times I borrowed money as I soon realised what a bad habit it was.

Second Stint in the FMS Volunteer Force

Two convivial friends coaxed me into joining the FMSVF in Tapah. They were the Magistrate, Captain Mohd Salleh bin Sulaiman, and Captain Abdul Hamid Khan, an English schoolteacher who made a meteoric rise to become Malaysia's Education Minister. During the Japanese Invasion of Malaya, I assisted the two men, as I will recount later.

Mohd Salleh and Abdul Hamid gave me every encouragement. For example, they promised me an immediate promotion to Second Lieutenant after Sergeant. Who did not want to look smart in an officer's uniform?

They also talked about how women would swoon over us in our incredibly attractive mess kits as we danced at functions in Ipoh. Once a year, we would camp at the Port Dickson military installation, where we would be rubbing shoulders with the Mat Sallehs (white men).

I was not cut out for a disciplined military lifestyle. All I was interested in was reading. So, six months later, I resigned with the excuse that I had very little free time outside work. It was not a total lie; I had to motorcycle for hours and then trek for miles to visit farms and land settlements deep in the interior. Sometimes, I was away for three days. I hardly had energy for volunteer force activities. For my two friends, volunteer activities were their keep-fit regimen.

A Young Man and His Motorcycle

One afternoon, I saw Ariffin kicking his BSA until it fell crashing down on the cemented floor of the porch. This was after many futile attempts to start its engine. I went over, put the machine upright, dismantled some parts, and cleaned and re-assembled them. It worked after that. A surprised Ariffin asked, "How come you know so much about motorcycles?"

I casually replied, "I once had one," recalling the AJS I owned while at the School of Agriculture in Kuala Lumpur. My course mates had laughed at the old junk, saying it was only good as a fumigator machine. What they did not know was that that old junk afforded me many pleasant memories. If only the AJS could talk! Ariffin then added, "Why did you not tell me? Tomorrow, go to Chenderiang, inspect the rice fields there, use my motorcycle." After that, I dare say I was the one who rode the motorcycle more often than its owner. Only then did it cross my mind what Jamil and Dahalan had meant when they said "wait and see."

A few months later, I managed to save up for a small BSA, just like Ariffin's, but mine was a 350cc machine, 100cc more than his. He merely commented on the size of my new buy, but there was envy in his tone of voice. But when I later bought a monstrous Coventry Eagle Flying Eight with the flying eight figure on both sides of the gas tank, my boss scolded me, "What? Do you want to die young?"

There were only two 890cc Flying Eagles in the entire state of Perak. The other belonged to a white man with a wooden leg. Sometimes, I raced with him. At other times, I raced with another white man, South Perak's School Supervisor, who drove a sleek racing car, but I don't remember the model.

My speed-crazy days cost me a couple of police summons and \$50. The first summons in Tapah was issued by a Police Inspector and

witnessed by yet another Inspector. In court, I defended myself with great conviction. I would have won the case if the Inspector had no witness. But which Magistrate would listen to a civilian, without a witness, fighting a summons by a Police Inspector with another Inspector as witness? No inspired oratory could have saved me. But after the case, the police constables in attendance congratulated me for my 'fine defence'.

The Police Inspector who issued the summons, Mohd Din bin Shariff, later married Mariam (formerly Maggie Elenor Fenner), while I married Mariam's sister, Mariah (formerly Dorothy Ida Fenner). What a coincidence! Mohd Din culminated his brilliant police career as the first Malay and first Malaysian to become Deputy Inspector General of Police. Mohd Din was Deputy to Inspector General of Police, Tan Sri Claude Fenner, who was not related to my wife's father, John William Henry Fenner.

One day, while writing a report, I noticed a *chettiar*, in an elegant white *dhoti* and carrying an ubiquitous black umbrella, coming up our pebble driveway. I wondered: "Which staff member was he going to approach, to collect his money?" But to my great surprise, he walked straight to my desk. All eyeballs were on me. "Don't tell me this new officer had already borrowed money!" the staff thought.

Sitting down respectfully in front of me, the old man with white lime paste stripes on his forehead asked, "Can you help me?" I expected him to ask me not to issue a summons on his rubber plantation or something to that effect. Instead, he said, "You know my shop is near that junction. I have a heart problem. Each time you make your way round the oil drum (a 'make-do' roundabout) at the junction, my heart stops. I fear you will crash. Could you please, in future, ride a little slowly when you reach that junction?" I promised him I would not again ride as fast as a bullet at the junction.

My speeding habit did not go unpunished; I had several accidents, small and not so small. Once, I tumbled hundreds of yards down a gully, but was helped by an aborigine farmer. One night, I obviously violated the traffic law when I took two young pillion riders (one Chinese, the other an Australian-Chinese) on a joy ride. Speeding past a tiny village outside town, I hit a pothole and skidded, throwing the last person on the bike off his seat. In turn, he pulled the middle passenger off with him.

The first fellow cried "Aiya!" as he fell heavily on the rough tarmac road, but the middle passenger was silent. By then I had fallen off my motorcycle too. Sarong-clad villagers, carrying oil lamps came to see the commotion. The first to fall, the son of a Tapah Chinese rubber dealer, suffered bad wounds on his back and knees. I did not panic but felt greatly responsible for the well being of these two young men. While trying to

console the frightened Chinese boy, I heard the other injured pillion rider saying in a panicky voice, "Help, I have lost my balls. Help me look for them!" Everyone within hearing distance laughed incessantly. I shone an oil-lamp at him, stuck one hand into his pants and found both items intact. My fears subsided, but the people laughed even more.

This same pillion rider then asked us to look for his dentures, but the villagers responded, "Where can we find it in this pitch-black night?" One suggested, "Maybe he has swallowed them!" Again, more guffaws. The Chinese boy was still lamenting "Aiya!" occasionally. I left my motorcycle under a villager's house and all three of us hitched rides back in to town. In the car, the two pillion riders were engrossed in practising 'lines' to tell their parents. I had cuts and bruises, but not serious enough to skip work. After work, I went to see the Chinese boy's father. He was very good to me. He merely said, "Never mind. What can one do?" and shook his head.

The passenger who thought he had lost his balls, Abdul Aziz (formerly Jack Ambrose Fenner) initially lied to his family members that he merely had a bicycling accident at the Tapah Rest House Hill, not a motorcycle accident out of town, but a few hours later, the truth was out. Just like a Malay saying, "The wide mouth of a jar can be closed, but not that of humans." A few weeks later, Abdul Aziz was seen sporting a row of gold capped front teeth, and by the grace of God, I was married to his sister Mariah later, in 1934.

Irish Politics

According to stories I had read, Irishmen were known for their fiery temperaments, but an Irishman I knew in Serdang, Dr Scott, was so soft-spoken and gentle, he could have been Malay. Dr Scott often talked about politics to me, especially Irish politics. Putting aside whatever he was doing, he would turn to me and begin a long narration of Irish political struggles.

Then again, the stories about the Reid brothers, two Irishmen living in Tapah, gave a picture very unlike Dr Scott. For example, there was a long compensation case pressed by the Reids after the Public Works Department (PWD) felled one of their mango trees to facilitate road widening. The Reids wrote to the PWD, with a copy to the Batang Padang District Officer, requesting compensation for the mango tree, complete with details of the tree's fruiting potential. The claim was apparently met. There were many stories about them that the British District Officer wrote on the cover of the Reid file, "To be opened only when the bell rings (at the end of the day)."

I told Jamil I would like to meet the Reids. “I don’t care if they have chased the District Officer with a billiard cue stick at the Tapah Club!” Jamil replied earnestly, “But you don’t know what they can do! Just last week, they let their dog out, to chase away a Notice Server. Good thing the guy knew how to climb a tree!”

Shortly after that conversation, Mr Reid and Dr Reid, who owned a rubber estate along the Cameron Highlands Road, appeared at our office. My boss welcomed them with a smile, one especially reserved for certain visitors. These two rather old gentlemen had extremely red faces – what the Malays would describe as *udang kena bakar*, or ‘grilled lobsters’. Some Tapah people called them ‘The Red Brothers’.

Ariffin introduced me as “My brilliant assistant, Mustapha.” I felt embarrassed by the adjective. Dr Reid casually produced a stem of white flowers with a couple of leaves attached to it, saying, “Please identify this plant and tell me its properties.” Ariffin handed the specimen to me saying, “Please.”

This was a delicate situation. I had not only to prove myself to the notorious Reid brothers, but also to justify the comments in my recommendation letter to my boss, especially now that he had used the word ‘brilliant’ to describe me. I accepted the specimen, held it carefully, muttering “ceae” and “ceae”, like an expert. I knew most floral specimens had the ‘ceae’ sound at the end of their Latin scientific names, like ‘anonaceae’, ‘convulvaceae’ and ‘arundinaceae’.

Excusing myself, I hurried to a cupboard in the next room, filled to the brim with *Redley’s Flora* series. I picked one out of the many, and by God, the book fell open to a page with a sketch that resembled the specimen. It turned out that it was indeed the specimen. Within minutes, I was back with Ariffin and the two brothers. As I read loudly from the opened book, the two Irishmen looked at one another and left without a word. Notice Server Jamil commented under his breath, “Not that they did not know the specimen, they just wanted to test your knowledge.” Apparently, my boss Ariffin had been tested many times, and often Ariffin just blabbered something.

When a letter from our Head Office’s Chemistry Department arrived later, requesting samples of *tuba* (poisonous roots) for toxin analysis, the only persons with these samples were the two Irishmen. Ariffin sent me to see them as he preferred not to handle the two ‘difficult Mat Sallehs’. On hearing my motorcycle stop, the Reids came out of their white-painted wooden house with verandahs all around, tied their black local mongrel to a guava tree and let me into their fenced compound. Somehow, as I walked towards their arched front door, my eyes strayed to a row of plants

with pretty finger-like leaves. Out of curiosity, I walked towards the bund. Suddenly, one of the brothers ran after me, explaining that they had planted these plants, cannabis (*ganja*), as an experiment.

Since I was able to quickly identify the unworthy flower specimen they had brought into my office, the Reids thought I recognised the cannabis plants. According to an enactment planting cannabis was forbidden, and they knew it. They also knew that offenders could be fined \$500. I thought to myself: was the cannabis for personal use or for medicinal purposes? Dr Reid was a medical doctor. Cannabis was also easily available, especially in Penang, where Sikhs openly smoked them using hookahs. There was no point in my reporting the matter. But I told them, "You must destroy these plants," and they nodded their heads.

I was invited into the house, where I told them the real reason for my visit. As they talked between themselves, I noticed racks and racks of books, including the many volumes of *Redley's Flora*. Jamil was right, they merely wanted to test our knowledge when they came to ask us to identify the specimen they brought. After much discussion, they agreed to let me have some of their *tuba* samples. "It is late now. Why don't we bring them over to your office tomorrow?" they suggested. I agreed to the arrangement but Ariffin was certain it would not happen. At exactly 9.00 am the next day, lo and behold, the two brothers arrived with *tuba* samples in brown envelopes. Ariffin was surprised. After that, he grew even more confident of my ability.

I often visited the Reids to borrow their books, which were mainly political, especially about Irish political struggles. If I remember rightly, there was one about Sir Roger Casement, an Irishman who was bestowed much honour by the British. But when it came to the choice of England versus his motherland, his patriotism shone through. He betrayed the British by making contacts with German ships during World War I. After a long trial, he was sentenced. I don't remember whether it was to life imprisonment or death.

The Reids carried their anti-English sentiments to distant Malaya, to the Englishmen running the country. We often discussed politics, and I was especially touched by their heart-rending stories of poor Irish peasants. The people of Tapah were amazed to see the two brothers' affection for me. They wondered what my secret was. Patriotism and politics were our only but nonetheless strong bond.

The Depression Years (1929-33)

I arrived in Tapah as an AA in 1931 during the Depression, when the price of primary commodities, such as rubber, tin, copra and timber, were

at rock bottom. There was, on top of that, a rice shortage. Thus, the price of rice rocketed while the price of rubber, the livelihood of many Malays, plummeted.

I heard that the construction of a new School of Agriculture planned in 1931 was almost shelved. The British Government took drastic steps to curtail spending: job recruitment was frozen, and redundant staff laid off. Chinese and Indian immigrants were encouraged to return to their motherlands at government expense, and administrative allocations were reduced. An envelope, for example, was used three times over. Clerks were still taken in, but on a lower salary scheme.

Rice was 18 cents per *gantang*, while rubber was only 6 cents a *kati* (1.3 pounds). A farmer had to produce 3 *katis* of rubber to buy a *gantang* of rice, and that was after an 18 cents subsidy per *gantang* from the government. Poor quality fish cost 6 to 10 cents a *kati*, medium quality beef 18 cents, sugar 6 cents, eggs a cent each and coconuts 2 cents each.

I saw villagers so poor they could only afford to buy a small can of rice and maybe a palm-full of sugar each time. Children had scabies, long necks and distended stomachs, all signs of malnutrition. These same symptoms were later seen during the Japanese Occupation (1942-45).

In these poverty-stricken villages, I was often served a murky-coloured hot drink that smelled like coffee, but tasted strange. It was coffee brewed with coffee leaves, not beans, as the beans were sold to buy food. I asked myself: "Why do the Malays have to be so poor? Why have we become like this? We own this land! When will we be free of the colonial shackles?"

Farmers were the worst hit, especially those who depended purely on rubber. Those with small plots of rice, or tiny orchards, yam or vegetable farms were in a better position. Many rubber growers had to mortgage their plots to *chettians* – they had no choice, as they had to feed their children. Even Malay Reservation grants were accepted by these *chettians*, who used self-serving Malay middlemen to destroy their own race.

British Policy towards Malay Farmers

It was British policy to encourage Malays to remain small-time farmers. Malay children were not to be given higher education in case they would be disinclined to till the land. To ensure farmers remained farmers, Malays were only allocated small plots. They owned coconut plantations and rubber smallholdings, but few were more than three acres each. Only a handful owned 10 to 15 acres, achieved by applying under several names. A farmer who did this had to be careful; if the village headman were to discover this, his land could be confiscated.

I found that most Malay Reservation land consisted of low-lying swampy tracts not wanted by white planters and estate owners. Drier, more level plots were taken by the estates, yet British representatives delivered long speeches claiming their generosity in ‘bestowing such gifts’ when allocating these poor tracts of land to the Malays.

Many Batang Padang District farmers were from Sumatra, and tilled remote plots in the interior, working collectively as they believed in ‘safety in numbers’. Although I was to motivate them to become more productive farmers (and I had many ideas), I knew it would be useless. For example, how were they to rear fowl when they had no money to buy chicks and chicken feed? They hardly had money to buy two meals a day for their children. My advice to them remained useless.

Visiting Aborigine Farmers

Visiting farms belonging to aborigines in Kuala Woh, Cameron Highlands, Chenderiang and Bidor was part of my duties. Some of the aborigines living in Cameron Highlands worked as government labourers, and some had wives who went to work too. Their huts along the Cameron Highlands Road were on stilts, with bamboo strip floors and woven *bertam* (a type of palm) walls. Each house had a dog, a very small one, which I could not find elsewhere. I wondered, were these domesticated wild dogs?

The aborigines tilled their land collectively, and seemed to be well organised; there were hardly any disputes. Photographers ‘hunted’ them for some ‘wild’ shots. But as time passed, the aborigines got wise and began to charge a small fee for being photographed. Why not? After all those photos had market value.

I visited their farms, but what advice could I give them? Every single farm practice they adopted was against everything I had learned at the School of Agriculture. They felled tall trees for fruit, rather than climbed them. They burnt plots of land, and after harvesting, left them to be eroded away, causing severe soil erosion that silted the river and caused floods. Under the circumstances, it was best for agricultural officers to just keep mum. They were not ready for modern farming know-how.

The aborigines came to town to sell their rattan and *petai* (tasty, but pungent green beans); the young ones climbed down the slopes in their loincloths, but would change into a pair of trousers and a shirt (carried in a small package) once they got into town. I found them intriguingly sharp. Once I asked one of them to climb a tall *berangan* (local chestnut) tree. He answered playfully, “There seems to be a ray of light, but I don’t seem to see the sun.” He meant, “No point in you jingling your coins in

your pocket, but not show me how much you would pay me to climb the tree!” That was what I call a smart remark.

Dispute with an Estate Manager and a Job Transfer

Banir Estate, formerly a 400-acre rubber estate, is now a disused mining area three miles north of Tapah. There were only two ways to get to Banir Village, either through Banir Estate – which required either a pass or a toll – or by train. Bordering Banir Estate were a handful of small rubber plots, owned by Sumatran Malays, in appalling condition. Most trees were severely infected by mouldy rot, a kind of fungus that attacked the bark and finally destroyed tapping potential. Applying Agrisol solution would remedy the blight, but a bottle cost 60 cents, beyond the means of poor farmers, especially when rubber was only 6 cents a *kati*. What were they to do?

This rot problem was reported to the District Officer and me by the white Banir Estate Manager who feared the fungi would spread to his trees. I went to see the Estate Manager to appeal to his sense of fairness; the Malay rubber growers were so deplorably poor that they deserved pity. Standing with his pale hands on his hips, he shouted at me, “It is their damn problem, not mine! Furthermore, these villagers must be taught a lesson.”

I replied equally loudly, “Do you know how much Agrisol costs compared to the price of rubber? How can these poor folk afford it? Since it is in the interest of your estate to stop the rot problem, why don’t you apply Agrisol to your row of rubber trees bordering their diseased plots? It may even help if you apply the solution to one or two rows of their trees!”

The infuriated manager was speechless except for a threat to take the matter higher up. Soon after, I wrote a letter to the District Officer, with a copy to the Estate Manager, suggesting the same measures to counter the rot disease. I think the Estate Manager took the matter higher up, for I was instructed to serve notices to the farmers in question. If they failed to do what they were told, they would be brought to court under the Pest Control Enactment.

Jamil was sent to serve the notices. Consequently, five farmers were summoned for being ‘stubborn’. A few days before the court case, I sought out my friend, Magistrate (Captain) Mohd Salleh bin Sulaiman and pleaded that he either dismiss the cases or impose minimal fines. But on the actual day, the most unpopular magistrate in Tapah presided over the case. What could I do? I could not help the farmers! They were fined \$5 each by this Magistrate, himself a Malay.

Five dollars was an unthinkable amount to these impoverished farmers. Each farmer would have to tap, collect, roll, smoke and sell almost a *pikul* (130 pounds) of rubber to pay the five dollars. What injustice! A foreign capitalist had oppressed these poor Malay farmers! I cried in my heart. I felt ashamed to face the farmers. I knew all of them, including a *haji* who was old and deaf. I planned to ask Jamil to give them the money for the fine, but alas, I was only earning a small salary. Again, I asked myself, "Why are the Malays, who own this land, so damn poor?" Jamil, in a most regretful tone, tried to console me, "What can we do? You came to this district during the Depression. Had you come earlier, when things were good, there was plenty of money. The *chettians* gave money, the Chinese rubber growers gave money, some even sent money regularly, once a year."

Following the dispute with the Estate Manager, a letter arrived transferring me from my Agricultural Assistant position in the field to a lecturing job at the School of Agriculture.

More About My Unforgettable First Boss Ariffin

I can write a whole volume on my first boss Ariffin, but I shall just jot down some sweet memories we shared for almost two years. Raja Mohamad, an Agricultural Officer from Kedah, with vast experience in rice planting, succeeded him.

Once, when Ariffin and I were riding his old, under-powered motorcycle on a narrow estate laterite road, he braked just short of a visible slippery stretch of road. We got off and he began to push his bike. Before I could open my mouth to suggest that we could still go on riding using a lower gear, he proudly said, "This is why I have never met with an accident."

Once he left a coat and some clean clothes at my house. I asked Jamil what this was all about. He sniggered and gave the same 'wait and see' routine. One evening, Ariffin arrived in a huge taxi and asked me to accompany him to the fun city of Ipoh. Then I knew why he had left his clothes in my house, so that his wife would not know where he was going. In Ipoh, we watched a movie from third-class seats, because he claimed he did not like the higher-class seats.

On another occasion, while I was at his house, he forbade me to use the word Penang or Pulau Pinang. I was to just say 'the island', so that his non-English-speaking wife would not know where we were going. So, we went to Penang and came back the same night. What good was it to travel all that distance and then rush back before one could really have a good time?

Ariffin was incredibly kind, generous, and a big spender. He behaved like a Malay Chief. All visitors to his home were welcomed, feasted and entertained, and rarely went home without a gift. On a hunting trip north of Tapah, Ariffin brought two helpers; one carried his gun and the other his bullets. He whispered to me, "See... You must not trust anyone."

He was forthright, honest and would not pander to the white officers. In fact, he loved to pull a fast one on them, and had a bottomless cache of practical jokes. If he were late for work, he would look for a spot with plenty of tall wet grass, and would wade in the grass for several minutes. As such, when he arrived at the office with his trouser legs wet and covered with grass, the white officers believed he had been out inspecting in the wee hours of the morning.

Later, when he came to the School of Agriculture in Serdang, together with other Agricultural Officers for a short poultry course, the group visited a chicken coop near a cherry tree. While the Principal, Mr Mann, was busy lecturing under the scorching sun, Ariffin was busy picking cherries off the tree. The mushy ripe cherries were then dropped one by one into the Principal's white coat-pocket without the Principal's knowledge. We almost burst out laughing at the seams, but Ariffin maintained a blank poker face. As the most senior officer, Ariffin later gave a brief thank you speech, followed by three hurrahs from the group. As Mr Mann reached into his coat-pocket to retrieve a handkerchief, he found mushy cherries instead. He just muttered "Damn!" under his breath.

My last meeting with Ariffin was just outside the Batu Gajah Prison in 1946. It was under most pathetic and moving, almost tragic, circumstances, a meeting of two firm friends – Ariffin, a blind pensioner, and I, his former assistant, an unemployed man just released from British political detention. Knowing my situation, he sincerely offered to assist me every month by contributing part of his paltry pension. I declined with an agony no words can ever describe. Tears ran down my emaciated cheeks. Although he was blind and his life depended solely on his small pension, he was so noble of heart as to have understood the grief and suffering of his former assistant.

Marital Bliss (1934): Mariah, My Teen Bride

I was married to Mariah binti Haji Abdul Hamid (formerly Dorothy Ida Fenner), a Temoh Station girl, in 1934, when I was 24 and she just turned 14 (most girls then were young teen brides). Her mother was a Penang-born Hakka Chinese, Ng Chiew Ni, and her father, John William Henry Fenner, an Australian tin-miner who had lived in Malaya from 1907 until his death in 1926. After John Fenner died, Ng Chiew Ni married a Malay Muslim man, Haji Abdul Hamid. She and her five Australian-Chinese children converted to Islam en masse just prior to her second marriage. My bride, Dorothy Ida, then ten years old, was given the Muslim name of Mariah, and brought up as a traditional Malay village girl. She was my own choice of a life partner.

Unlike most parents at that time, my parents gave us a free hand to choose our own brides. My mother told me, "We have given you sufficient education. You now have a good job. If you wish to settle down, save up for your future and find a partner. But try to marry only after you have seen life." In other words, do not jump into a marriage. My mother was most liberal in this respect, "Whoever you decide to marry will be my daughter-in-law, even if she has short hair (quite unthinkable in those days)! But do try to find a girl from a good family."

I had seen my future bride from a distance, when I visited the Temoh Station Malay School to inspect the vegetable farm there and to teach Nature Study. I taught the pupils the basics about plants, osmosis, photosynthesis, and most importantly, plant reproduction. After these lectures, Mariah, a bright student, often raised her hand to answer questions.

I found Malay pupils at that time (1931) extremely interested in science, but unfortunately, the Malays were colonised by a race who preferred to keep 'native children' perpetually in the dark. The British did not wish to see local children become educated and thinking adults who might unleash their energies against them. Education was provided, but only to a level deemed fit for 'the Malays'. Thus, the educational progress of the Malays was hampered.

Take, for example, R.O. Winstedt, an exceptionally talented man and gifted writer who compiled an impressive Malay dictionary. But whatever

he did was in the interest of the British colonial masters. He was responsible for looking into Malay education and syllabi. But after returning from a visit of schools in Indonesia, instead of upgrading Malay education, he recommended that it be reduced by one level, below Standard V. Why? So that “Malay pupils don’t forget to till farms.” With his suggestion, vegetable farms sprouted in schools throughout the country. After his trip to the Philippines, he came up with the bright idea of teaching students the art of weaving baskets from bamboo. Thus, a class to teach basketry was introduced at the Sultan Idris Training College for teachers.

These destructive recommendations were no surprise. Did the British not sink two ships laden with our books (in the early 19th century), so that their lamps would burn brighter, while ours would dim in sharp contrast? Similarly, Malay treasures were transported to England for so-called ‘safekeeping’. With no significant link to our past, how could we Malays, as a race, take creative and constructive steps towards our future? The British felt insecure; should a Malay intelligentsia emerge, their grip on Malaya would be threatened. Furthermore, they much desired a politically ignorant Malay community. If Mr Winstedt was indeed a sincere educationist with pure intentions, why did he not propose a more scientific and technical syllabus for Malay schools?

In the 1930s, Malay children’s opportunities to enter English schools were extremely slim. The number of Malays in English schools in the Federated Malay States barely reached 15 per cent. According to Dr Philip Loh Fook Seng, who researched pre-World War II Malay education policy, in 1913 Malay community leaders had demanded English schools in Lenggong and Krian in Perak, but were turned down. In 1916, another group of Malays requested an English medium class be introduced in the Kelang Malay School. The Selangor Resident then agreed to the request, but after three months of implementation in 1917, it was closed down under the orders of the Chief Secretary to the Federated Malay States. It was obvious that the British did not wish to see Malay children advance and thrive with English-medium education.¹

A week before my move to the School of Agriculture in Serdang to assume my new teaching assignment in 1933, I went to Temoh Station to visit Haji Ibrahim, the village headman, who had kindly ‘adopted’ me. He was one of the many village headmen who had openly welcomed me into their homes whenever I happened to visit their area, especially after I had been out in the sun inspecting farms and schools. He was a jovial and fun sort of person.

During this last visit, he asked me out of the blue, “Are you not interested in settling down? With someone from this area?” Jokingly, I replied, “With whom?” “You just give me the word and I will look around for you. There are some very modern girls in Teluk Anson (now Teluk Intan). You just point out the girl to me. I will do everything else.”

I replied, “No, I don’t want Teluk Anson girls. But if you would like to help me, and if you would like to see me come back here more often, what about that daughter of Haji Hamid?” He lowered his eyes and informed me that according to rumours, she was already betrothed. I insisted that he investigate, but was not sure what the outcome would be.

There were many tears when Haji Ibrahim and his family bade me farewell when I left for Serdang in Selangor. Within weeks, however, my foster father, Haji Ibrahim wrote to say that my marriage proposal would be accepted by the family on certain conditions. Excitedly, I wrote back, asking him on my behalf to arrange for a formal proposal.

My proposal was formally accepted with a request for *belanja tubuh* (gift for the bride) of \$62.50 and *belanja hangus* (dowry from bridegroom to bride for wedding expenses) of \$250. I then made arrangements for a loan from the Malay Co-operative Society.

During our two-year engagement, when my future wife was taken out of school at her father’s insistence, I was not allowed to meet her, let alone take her out (dating was unheard of then). We were wed at my future wife’s home in Temoh Station according to Malay custom. Haji Ibrahim, who was ecstatic at playing the matchmaker role, did everything for me. I am forever indebted to him for the marital bliss I have enjoyed for 42 years. After the wedding, I took my wife back to Serdang. She brought along with her the customary pair of gold anklets, a brass tray, a bed and some kitchenware.

As was considered proper at that time, we also brought with us two old ladies to chaperone and keep my wife company for a little while until she grew accustomed to her new home and to her new role as a wife. One of them was my aunt, Mak Endak Mariam, who had watched me grow from infancy. She gave excellent advice. She told my wife to always look after me, not just from a physical perspective, but also “to look after his heart” (my emotional needs), and that she should be a responsible wife devoted to wifely duties.

Her final advice, “Even if you just want to go next door to visit a neighbour, you must first get his permission.” Thanks to her advice and my wife’s absolute dedication, we have enjoyed marital bliss for more than four decades.²

Notes

1. These details are from a history book compiled by Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, Khoo Kay Kim and Mohd Yusof bin Ibrahim.
2. Mustapha remained married to Mariah for 53 years until his death on 15 January 1987, leaving behind nine children, 30 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. Now (in 2004) there are 31 grandchildren, 42 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandson.

Teaching at Serdang (1933-41)

Upon my transfer to Serdang on 1 January 1933, for the second time I had to fill the large shoes of Enchik Tak bin Haji Daud. I had replaced him in 1931 as Agricultural Assistant (AA) for the Kinta and Batang Padang Districts, and now, I was to take over his teaching job at Serdang. A big question was on everyone's mind: What had prompted Enchik Tak to request immediate transfer to the Field Office? Although efficient, diligent and honest, Enchik Tak was rumoured to be evading a possible nervous breakdown.

Accompanied by a few pieces of basic furniture collected during my two-year stay in Tapah, I moved to Serdang by train. Reporting for duty on 2 January 1933, I was welcomed by Mr Mann, my former Principal at the School of Agriculture during my Malay Apprentice years. As Principal of the School of Agriculture in its new impressive location in Serdang since its opening on 21 May 1931, Mr Mann was now to be my boss. We did away with lengthy introductions; we knew each other like the backs of our hands. But Mr Mann dwelled at length on my "role at the School of Agriculture of Malaya," emphasising the word 'Malaya' each time.

As Agricultural Assistant Grade II at the school, my main responsibilities were to teach one-year Certificate Course students (Malays only) in Malay and three-year Diploma Course students (all races) in English. I must admit that at that point of time in my life, I was more conversant in English than in my own mother tongue, but I resolved to be equally conversant within a couple of months.

For the Certificate Course, I taught Nature Study, Botany, Mycology, Bacteriology, Entomology, Agricultural Mathematics and Major Crops, such as rubber, rice, coconut and oil palm. In my introductory lesson, I pledged my commitment to teach to the best of my ability. "Even though no one will be checking on my performance, I will do everything within my means to impart knowledge. I want you, my own race, the Malay race, to do well!"

“I do not want our people to continue living like ‘a frog under a coconut shell.’ It is time we venture to conquer the world. That is the only way we, the Malays, can brace ourselves against manipulations by British colonialists,” I stated openly. Promising to teach them more than what the syllabus called for, I invited them to meet me in my office, or at my house, even on the tennis court. All I wanted was that they become a group of knowledgeable and learned young Malays. “The future of Malaya is in the hands of young people like you!”

I took this opportunity to remind them how fortunate they were to be able to study science subjects after having completed Malay School Standard V at a time when not a single Malay school taught science. “You should want to learn as much, not just in my class, but beyond this course. You must hunger for more knowledge than what I can impart in one year,” I advised them.

I then appealed to their consciences, “And after you have left this course, you must not forget to impart your knowledge to our people anywhere you go, even in mosques. You must feel sorry that your Malay brothers have no opportunity to learn what you will be learning here.” Finally, I lamented, “It is sad that the Arabs who came to trade here only brought with them books relevant to the ‘next world’, when they possess priceless collections of books on various subjects including high science. What a shame!”

I covered the one-year Certificate Course syllabus in just one term. Feeling greatly responsible for these thirsty young minds, I spent hours at home upgrading the quality of their lessons. I did not have the heart to let the eager minds sitting in front of me in class go to waste! Their minds were like highly porous sponges, ready to absorb precious knowledge. In the absence of textbooks and reference tomes, they spent hours taking down notes and articles from the board. I regret my notes were destroyed in the plundering of World War II. Office boy Mohd Rais bin Abdul Karim later informed me that these Malay students saw me as a ‘tiger’ in the first two terms, but in the final term, I had changed into a ‘friend’ in their eyes.

For the multiracial three-year Diploma Course, I was to teach only two subjects; Botany and Major Crops. Botany, my personal favourite, was easy to lecture on as it came straight from my heart. Still, I kept learning; I had students from India, the Victoria Institution in Kuala Lumpur and Raffles Institution of Singapore, where botany was a subject. I kept learning by reading American books and translated German works, until I was able to master botany. I had no degree, but my students had full confidence in my ability.

Major Crops was much easier for the students to learn as there was an excellent textbook. Written by an Englishman, it contained meticulous details on all types of major crops, seedling selection, soil selection, growing techniques, pruning, weeding, fertilising, pest control, uses and other information. I believe no recent publication is comparable to it.

The School's Biology Lab was relatively well-equipped for the times. It had water taps, Bunsen burners, microscopes, magnifying glasses, projectors and slide machines. New equipment was regularly obtained by ordering them from the Crown Agents in London. For both courses, I encouraged practical work as I did not want them to suffer the same fate I did.

Still, there were other teaching tasks: teaching students to tap, collect, process and smoke rubber sheets and to bud-graft plants and make copra. On certain weekends, I accompanied students to visit coconut plantations, rubber estates, pineapple plantations, oil mills and match factories. I taught only ten and a half hours a week, but there were countless other duties: compiling notes and articles; translating letters from Malay into English for the Principal and his Deputy; translating agricultural articles and brochures from English to Malay; responding to job and scholarship application letters; and handling correspondence from the Sultan Idris Training College, the Translation Department, Agricultural Department and other offices in Kuala Lumpur.

Over and above all this, I was Food Officer, Hostel Warden and Resident Teacher rolled into one. Some of these responsibilities were heaped on me because the School could not afford to recruit new staff in those Depression years. Perhaps that explained the reluctance displayed by other Agricultural Assistants to hold the post. But never for one moment was I discouraged; I was excited and happy to teach, to lead my race towards progress and a less bleak future. Looking at the many tasks expected of me, it was no surprise why diligent and hardworking Enchik Tak had requested a transfer. But I held on to my belief that if I worked hard to prove myself, the school administrators would learn to respect me. I was right.

Enthusiastic volunteer officers, Mr Mann and his Canadian Assistant Principal, Mr Dawson (who had also taught me at the former School) coaxed me to join the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF). It was to be my third and last stint. The two promised all kinds of perks, including an opportunity to join the Malay Voluntary Infantry (MVI) Course in Port Dickson, after which I would earn my Second Lieutenant rank. They even promised to set up a small shooting range in Serdang for me to practise. In other words, they were willing to do anything and everything to keep me in the force.

I did try. I attended several drills, but soon my interest waned. It was not in my blood. I have been a pacifist since childhood. I had given my pet bird a decent burial with downcast eyes swimming in tears. How could I ever learn to enjoy an avocation that taught me how to kill? On the excuses that my health was not robust and gregarious enough, and being saddled with too much work, I left the Volunteer Force.

Whenever Mr Mann took home leave – which often took months as he had to take an ocean liner – Mr Dawson took charge. He was responsible for upgrading my social standing and simultaneously uplifting my spirits. I was often embarrassed, and the School should also have been, when visitors pointed to my one-bedroom house and asked, “Is that the gardener’s house?” With Mr Dawson’s help, I moved to a much larger house. When I lamented that my additional duties as Hostel Warden, Food Manager and Resident Teacher were not compensated, Mr Dawson kindly wrote to the Director of Agriculture, who approved a small allowance.

When Europeans working at the Serdang Experimental Farm were searching for a Malay-language teacher to help them through their Standard I and Standard II Malay Language examinations, Mr Dawson recommended me. Thus, my income improved and I managed to uphold my standing as a teacher at the School. Noble of heart, Mr Dawson assisted me in countless ways. But I remember him most for motivating me politically, and I thank him from the bottom of my heart. Should he still be alive, I welcome him to read this book and come up with his own judgment. Was I a traitor? I do understand if he is still upset with me. Who would not be if he knew that I was on the side of the enemy during World War II?

Recommended to Cambridge or Trinidad

One afternoon, Selangor’s British Resident Mr T.S. Adams and the Sultan of Selangor visited the School. After watching me lecture my Diploma Course class, he left to discuss an important matter with Mr Mann. The next day, I was invited to Mr Mann’s office. Other staff and students had to knock on his door and wait for his stern “Come In,” but I could enter his office at any time. I could even sit on his chair and smoke one of his Players No. 3 cigarettes. Perhaps that was why students called me the ‘Second Mr Mann’.

After revealing that Mr T.S. Adams had suggested the School send a student to Cambridge or Trinidad, where there was an excellent tropical agricultural school, Mr Mann asked whom I would recommend. Two names immediately came to mind: Hussain bin Haji Alang Samsuddin and

Ong Kee Hui (later Tan Sri, Minister of Science, Technology and Environment, Malaysia). Hussain was a top student, a prefect, a Sergeant in the FMSVF and an excellent hockey and soccer player. Ong Kee Hui was an outstanding student in all subjects, an able tennis player (my partner sometimes) and had an impressive command of the English language. I concluded that should these two be sent, they would come back with excellent results. After listening to me, Mr Mann expressed his reservation that the two were not very good in chemistry and physics. I told him that nothing was impossible, and that given six months of extra tuition, the two boys would prove themselves.

After a short silence, during which time he played with his pencil, he spoke very deliberately, "I'm thinking of sending you Mustapha, but with the smattering of politics that you may pick up in bars in England, don't come back and make Malaya a second India." I understood. His words echoed in my mind. I understood his anxiety. It was his responsibility to remind me; it was his duty to at least save one white man's job. I thanked him for his confidence in my academic ability and left. Poor Mr Mann. He was a highly capable administrator, but had no inkling that politics already existed in Malaya, or for that matter, in any colonised nation, not just in England. Nationalistic fervour throbs in the bosoms of every colonised people; the only difference lies in its intensity. Nationalism is desirable at any level, to any degree, except among misguided people.

Recommendation to a Junior Lecturer's Post

In 1941, I was called by Mr Mann to his office, where he asked enthusiastically, "Mustapha, are you ready for some good news?" I gave a sprightly "Yes, Sir!" He then explained very carefully that he had had a long talk with Junior Lecturer Enchik Mohd Noor, and following a scrutiny of his service records, Mr Mann had advised Mohd Noor to retire. I listened in complete silence, trying to guess which direction the explanation was heading. Then, he announced as a matter of fact, "Should Mohd Noor retire, I want you to take over his position!"

I was stunned. I had not, at any point of time, requested the post, nor did I instigate Mr Mann about Mohd Noor. Furthermore, it was a super-scale position, two steps above mine. To refuse would displease Mr Mann, but at the same time, I did not want to sour my ties with Mohd Noor, a good friend. I discussed the matter with my wife Mariah. It was the pinnacle for Agricultural Assistants, yet I was apprehensive. My wife and I decided to just wait and see.

Mr Mann, by virtue of being Education Branch Head, was Secretary of the Promotions Board. At the end of three days of meetings, he called me into his room to relate in full what had taken place. He looked utterly disappointed, as if he was the candidate being considered, instead of me. He told me he had tried his best to push me to the super-scale position, but was blocked by Director of Agriculture, Mr W.N.C. Belgrave. There were two other candidates – one from Perak and the other from Selangor – being strongly recommended by their respective bosses. They had the advantage of already holding Grade I posts, while I was still in Grade II.

The Selangor candidate was easy to write off as he had violated the ‘General Orders’, a code of ethics for British Malaya’s Civil Servants. Mr Mann then called up the Perak candidate’s promotion papers to demonstrate what a mediocre officer he was. The candidate’s British boss persistently stuck to his recommendation. But when Mr Mann continued to pressure him, he made a blunder, admitting that the Perak candidate was a troublemaker. Mr Mann was delighted. He firmly declared, “I do not want a troublemaker as a Junior Lecturer in my School.” After that incident, the Director of Agriculture Mr Belgrave, who did not get on well with Mr Mann, called him a Gestapo.

When it was time to discuss my name, the most junior among the three, Mr Mann produced stacks of notes written by me in both Malay and English, proudly saying, “This is proof enough that this person, Mustapha, is the most qualified for the super-scale position!” The Promotion Board’s panel members agreed wholeheartedly with this claim, but pointed out that in the entire history of Malaya’s Agricultural Department, no one had been promoted directly from Grade II to a super-scale position without first becoming Grade I Officer. Mr Mann raised his voice to argue that, “Nowhere in the Agricultural Assistant Scheme was it ever mentioned that a Grade II Officer could not be promoted straight to super-scale level!” After some deliberation, the matter was put to a vote. Mr Mann lost. As a consequence, I had to wait till I got my Grade I position.

After relating the incident, my distraught boss said, “It is not a totally hopeless case, Mustapha. I have at least stopped another person from filling the post. I am determined to give it to you as soon as you reach your Grade I level. Next year?” After a brief silence, he asked with a twinkle in his eye, “What do I get for helping you, Mustapha?” I replied earnestly, “Nothing, except my sincere gratitude and a pledge to work even harder.” He smiled broadly, letting more perspiration gather under his chin before wiping it with a Pyramid-brand handkerchief. He then nodded his head, “I am satisfied with that pledge.”

A few days later, when Mohd Noor's house was vacated, I moved in with my pregnant wife and two daughters, Ayesha and Hendun, six and two years old. For reasons only God knows, three days later, I fell ill. Unable to walk, I was carried on a stretcher to the Kuala Lumpur Malay Hospital. Later, upon my discharge on 5 December 1941, I returned to the house. Again, as fate had it, I had to leave the house a day later, two days before the outbreak of World War II on 8 December 1941, this time never to return. In the upheavals of war that ensued, the house was plundered clean and I lost everything I owned, the most valuable being my cherished book collection. As a Malay who believes in providence, I can only say, "It was meant to be!"

Efforts to Improve the Social Status of My Own Race

Heart-wrenching privations among Malay students were plain for all to see. Chinese students arrived at the hostel lugging enormous suitcases with all necessities. Malay students came with hardly anything; some carried clothes bundled in sarongs. I remember one particular student who appeared with just one change of clothes, an old pillow and a worn straw mat. He wore a string to keep his pants up. Struck by his pitiful situation, I passed a hat around to collect donations, initially among Malay boys, but when the Chinese students heard about this pathetic case, they contributed generously. I then took this emaciated Perak student on my motorcycle to Kuala Lumpur to buy clothes and other essentials. This student completed his course, got a job with the Field Office and worked his way up to a Special Grade position.

Twenty years later, when I tried to look him up in Bagan Serai, Perak, where I was selling insurance, he did not want to see me. I don't understand why. Was he embarrassed because I knew of his wretched beginnings? Other former students have always welcomed me with open arms, but this one vanished into thin air. It takes all kinds to make this world.

While tutoring Malay to British Officers at the Serdang Experimental Farm, I often voiced my dissatisfaction at the British Government for not implementing a pro-Malay policy in the true sense of the word. Although the 'General Orders' mentioned priority for Malays, in practice, it was far from the truth. The British were merely paying lip service, or as the Malay saying goes, 'planting sugar cane on the lips'.

I carried on an unrelenting private campaign among newly arrived British Officers who came to me for Malay lessons to impart in them a love for Malays. I asked them how many Malays were actually working

at the Experimental Farm? The answer: Not one! The reason? The British boss had employed an Indian Chief Clerk, who had, over time, asserted himself as “Boss Number Two”, and only employed his own people.

I told one British Officer to observe how every labourer had to jump off his bicycle and push it whenever he passed in front of the Chief Clerk’s house. This was the mark of respect demanded by the Chief Clerk. He promised to check on this and to take action. At the same time, he asked me to look for Malay labourers. I brought in several Malay workers, and they were the first intake of Malays at the Experimental Farm. Little by little, the power of the Indian Chief Clerk dwindled. After a while, no labourer had to jump off his bicycle every time he passed in front of the Chief Clerk’s house. Naturally, my action infuriated the Indian and Ceylonese Clerks at the School, but I did not care.

It is with deep regret that I record the untimely demise of this caring Englishman (with an equally gentle name, Lucy) after contracting tropical typhus carried by rats on an oil-palm estate he visited daily. I remember, while tutoring him one afternoon, we were distracted by the horrid ‘keruk, keruk’ sound made by a *sesumpah* (a small long-tongued chameleon). Lucy told me that the damn reptile had been croaking for several days. Alarmed at my reaction, he asked if it meant anything to the Malays. Sadly, I told him that according to Malay belief, the consequence could be very grave; for example, as the owner of the house, he might have to leave it. He replied tongue-in-cheek, “I have not received any transfer directive or any such letter.” He then joked, “We’ll just wait and see if this forecast by wise man Mustapha is true.” Three days after that, not only did I lose a diligent student and compassionate friend, but the Malay community in Serdang also lost a Malay-loving Englishman.

Nevertheless, as the Malay saying goes, “what is broken off, sprouts afresh.” Three other Officers who came after him proved to be equally sympathetic to the Malays after listening to my arguments. Not only were they willing to employ Malay labourers, but handled them well. In return, the Malay labourers gave their all. The three were Dr Scott (an Irishman), Dr Brown (a Scotsman) and an Englishman whose name I cannot recall. What I remember about the Englishman was that he was an extremely lazy student. They labelled me an ‘ultra-nationalist’, to which I responded, “Aren’t the Irish? And the Scots?” They laughed upon hearing that.

Dr Scott was plagued by nasty boils that appeared all over his body, even in the most unlikely spots. Remembering my grandmother’s tip, I suggested he swallow *jeruju* (the small fruit of a tidal shrub with white or mauve flowers and holly-like leaves – *acanthus ebracteatus*). One small fruit would guarantee non-recurrence for a year. He asked me to look for

seven of them. With God's grace, he did not get any boils for a full year. He was ecstatic and wished to initiate a full-scale analysis of the fruit's properties, but unfortunately, the outbreak of World War II caused the *jeruju* to fail to make its name as effective medication against boils.

At the School of Agriculture itself, I succeeded in influencing Mr Dawson to employ Malay workers. More and more, Malay workers were seen entering the School compound on their bicycles. Mr Dawson was satisfied and happy to be of help to the Malays, but these efforts were a bit too late. Anti-British sentiments had been brewing for some time, like a boil collecting septic puss, waiting for a moment to explode.

The British Government employed non-Malays mostly as postmen. To rectify this unsatisfactory situation, I instructed all Malay students to write the names and addresses on their envelopes in Arabic or Jawi script. The same was asked of their parents and friends. This, I hoped, would force the British to rethink their employment policy as far as the postal service was concerned. I don't know how effective my effort was.

As Hostel Warden in charge of eighty students, I was expected to run the hostel according to the strict rules stipulated in the school prospectus, but on many occasions, I closed one eye. Once, a small misunderstanding arose between the students and the administration, leading to a small demonstration and some slogan-shouting. In the absence of a student body, three students suffered the consequences and were expelled. I was distraught. While Mr Dawson was managing the school in the absence of Mr Mann, I mediated a request for a student body, as proposed by student Ong Kee Hui. Mr Dawson, a liberal Canadian, listened attentively to the proposal and approved it. From then on, misunderstandings were resolved peacefully between administration and students.¹

Ragging was an annual affair. Freshies (new students) were forced to wade (and sometimes swim) in a pool of water mixed with cow dung. It was not a School of Agriculture otherwise! On one New Year's Day, I found beer bottles, packs of cards and broken windowpanes in the Common Room. I closed one eye, called a labourer to clean up the place and ordered the Public Works Department (PWD) *mandore* (supervisor) to replace the windowpanes.

The boys were always up to mischief, but I generally forgave them except for one incident that truly enraged me. Singaporean students had given unknowing Malayan students 'Brooklax', a chocolate-flavoured laxative. The next day, a Medical Orderly had to be called in to treat the green-in-the-face Malayan boys. As Hostel Warden and Resident Teacher, I knew every one of the eighty boys fairly well, perhaps better than their own parents. I knew their academic ability, hobbies, likes, dislikes and

inclinations. Thus, Mr Mann left the task of recommending graduates to different job openings to me. I take my hat off to the students. In the absence of textbooks, reference material, facilities and amenities, they were industrious and resourceful in their own ways to improve their knowledge. I am proud to have been their teacher.

The hostel building consisted of four dormitories, two each for Malay and non-Malay students. The furniture, produced by the government's carpentry shop, was very basic. Each student had a single plank bed, a wooden chest for their clothes, a box and a mosquito net. Directly above the eating hall was a Common Room, with a ping-pong table, chess and draught sets. A cupboard at the rear overflowed with books, but not a single one was political in nature. This was to be expected in colonised Malaya.

George Ernest Mann, First Principal of the Serdang School of Agriculture

Mr Mann, a strict and highly disciplined Englishman, expected the same traits of his students and colleagues. I am indebted to him for it was he who taught me to be systematic, meticulous, analytical and organised in my work. Although he was firm and stern, I had not provided him with any opportunity to bully me. Many times, I refused tasks that I should not have been given. That made him respect me.

Underneath his stiff front was a gentle, considerate man. Let me quote an example. One morning, out of the blue, he came to see me in my office. Everyone on the first floor held their breath; Mr Mann hardly ever came upstairs. They were wondering, "Why is Mr Mann looking for Enchik Mustapha so early in the morning?" After responding to my "Good morning," he sat down and asked, "What notes are you compiling now?" Before I could explain, he fidgeted in his seat, and shortly after, muttered something under his breath and walked out.

Without giving me any hint, two days later, several labourers carried four new chairs, including a new working chair, into my office. I was surprised to see this modern cane furniture with soft cushions. Because the chair he had sat in in my office was uncomfortable, he guessed I was just as uncomfortable, so he ordered new ones for me. This was just one of many incidents when this very formal Englishman demonstrated that I was no subordinate, but a fellow educator.

When Britain lost Singapore to the Japanese, I looked for Mr Mann in several collection centres and camps. Had I met him, I would have requested the Japanese to give him special treatment as he was my former boss, as I then had a 'certain' connection with the Japanese. Mr Mann

was interned as a POW (prisoner-of-war) for the entire Occupation of Malaya (three years and eight months), during which time he was totally cut off from his wife Edith and two children, Doreen and Peter, who were luckily in England when World War II broke out. After British re-establishment in Malaya, he returned to England a very different man. War does many things.

For 35 long years after I last saw him in Serdang, I was reluctant to write to him although I longed to know what had happened to him. I was not sure what his feelings were towards me, a former colleague involved in World War II on the Japanese side. I thought it unwise to write to him unless I first knew his feelings for me. It was impossible for him not to have heard something about my co-operation with the enemy forces. If he did some recalling, he must surely remember some of my activities at the School. I was suspected of leaking the information that the School was going to reduce the number of Malay students on scholarship. He knew that I taught politics in class, a violation of the 'General Orders'.

A few days before the outbreak of World War II, a team of British Police had rushed to the School to pick me up. I was then Vice President of the Young Malay Union (KMM). Many KMM members all over Malaya were arrested at about the same time. Luckily, by then, I had left Serdang to return to my parent's home in Matang. Did he feel that he had misplaced his trust in me? This would be impossible for someone from a renowned colonising lot. I could not answer these questions. I felt many things would be unresolved until we met again. Unfortunately, I was unable to travel to England as I was only making ends meet. And then in 1976, former student Enchik Mahmud bin Yaacub of Kelantan came to visit me with a letter from Mr Mann enquiring about me:

Can you please give me any information on Enchik Mustapha, a member of the teaching staff at Serdang till the beginning of World War II? He suffered a nervous disorder because of the Director of Agriculture then. I wanted Mustapha to be promoted as a Junior Lecturer, but the Director of Agriculture who hated me lashed out against Mustapha in order to spite me.

Encouraged by the query, I wrote to him about my family and the not-so-good old-age life that I was leading. His reply on 21 April 1976 was my most precious letter, from a boss and a friend of so long ago:²

Dear Enchik Mustapha,

I was very surprised, and most of all delighted, to get your letter of 15th April yesterday. It is such a long time since the days I last saw you and spoke to you at Serdang. I shall never forget those days – or forgive Belgrave (now long since dead). Belgrave hated me, for a number of reasons, and when he found a chance to hurt me by hurting you, he did not hesitate to do so. I reported the circumstances fully to the Colonial Office in London when I returned to England after internment, but had no acknowledgement.

Mr Mann was a boss who had shown complete faith and trust in me right to the very end. When a team of policemen, accompanied by a British Officer from the Serdang Experimental Farm came to arrest me a few days before the war broke out, Mr Mann had admonished them for making wild allegations against a staff member of the School! He even threatened to take civil action against the British Officer for defamation. After reading my long explanation of my involvement in World War II in my letter, Mr Mann responded:

The story I was told about you (I can't remember who told me, but it was in Singapore, during my internment) was to the effect that you had 'led' the Japs into Taiping – inferring that you were either a traitor or at least a collaborator. I said at the time (and since):

- a. I don't believe it. This story is a rumour and probably a lie.
- b. If it is true, then I will always defend Mustapha because I know for a fact that – at the time – he was seriously ill because of a nervous breakdown caused by Belgrave's unfair treatment of you (to spite me), and that you were not responsible for your actions at the time.

Now I have the true story, direct from you; and I want to say at once that I still do not regard you as a traitor or collaborator. There was a war on; and if, in my civies, 3 or 4 Japs had come to my house in uniform, carrying rifles and wearing thick 'bower' boots, and had told me to go with them, I should have jolly well gone with them. I am no coward, but I am no fool, and I know when somebody else is 'wearing the trousers'.

To continue, I think that discretion is the better part of valour – to put it vulgarly, "it is no use farting against thunder."

Who the chap was who guided the Japs to you, I do not know – I cannot remember him at all. Your label (Onan) presumably means 'ANONYMOUS' or 'NAMELESS'.

Now, Mustapha, you are still my good and trusted friend and I still always remember you as you were at Serdang before your illness – loyal, keen as a mustard on your job and jolly good at it too! My wife joins me in saying to you – "Put the whole matter right out of your mind, and hold your head up high as you always did."

Forgive my bad handwriting – my hands are rather shaky these days, even tho' I try to write slowly. I trust you can read well enough what I have said – which is, that you Mustapha and I George Mann are still (and have never been anything else) the best of friends. So, cheer up, keep well (in spite of that awful asthma), stay happy, and enjoy your life and your family (to whom I send our kind regards).

Your old friend,
signed George Mann

P/S (BOWER BOOTS = BOTHER BOOTS, worn by men who intend to cause as much damage to life and property as possible).

(Mr Belgrave was then Director of Agriculture, Malaya, who agreed, rather reluctantly, to my promotion to the super-scale appointment only in 1942, but then, the war came.)

Notes

1. I am writing this based on my experience. I was then working for the British administration in colonial Malaya.
2. *Translator's note:* I inherited the stack of correspondence between my father Mustapha and Mr Mann, reflecting the undying faith and loyalty between the two friends. Despite the fact that Mr Mann had suffered almost four years of mental anguish and deprivation in internment, there was still room for warmth and love in his heart.

Mr Mann died in England on 12 June 1980. My father cried upon receiving the news from Mr Mann's only daughter, Mrs Doreen Fletcher. She had come across the correspondence between the two men as she was clearing her father's belongings.

For several years, Doreen carried on writing to 'a friend of my late father' without knowing the background to the relationship. Doreen was born in Batu Gajah, Perak, Malaya, but had left to go to school in England before World War II. She, her mother and brother thus escaped internment in Singapore. Doreen generously kept corresponding with the faceless Malay who once worked with her late father in faraway colonial Malaya. Then, in 1987, it was my turn to lose my father. Out of courtesy, I wrote to Doreen in England, informing her of my father's demise. This second generation friendship has blossomed, and we have become good friends.

Doreen visited Malaysia, her birth country, in 1989, when she visited her childhood residence on the breathtaking campus of the Agriculture University of Malaysia (formerly School of Agriculture of Malaya) and even visited the hospital room she was born in, in Batu Gajah Hospital, Perak. Our two families are very close, and we hope to cultivate a third generation connection. Doreen's daughter Alison seems interested to keep it going.

I must state here that my father was a true nationalist with undiluted anti-colonial sentiments, but he did not bear personal grudges against individuals who served the colonial authorities.

Stoking the Nationalist Fire

As Hostel Warden for the School of Agriculture in Serdang, daily inspections of the four dormitories were part of my routine. I often stopped to chat with students in their Common Room. There, scattered on the coffee table were several publications: *The Malay Mail* (a Kuala Lumpur-based English daily); *The Daily Mirror* (a newspaper from England); *Warta Malaya* (a Singapore-based Malay newspaper); *Majlis* (a Kuala Lumpur-based Malay newspaper); *Saudara* (a Penang-based Malay newspaper); and much later, *Utusan Melayu* (a Singapore-based Malay daily).

I had stopped reading Malay newspapers since age eighteen when I joined the former School of Agriculture as a Malay Apprentice. Before that, while staying in my parent's home in Matang, I had been the unofficial translator of Malay editorials for my father and brothers. Reacquainting myself with these Malay papers, a torrent of nationalistic feelings, deep Malay consciousness, and an increasing awareness of the plight of poor Malays returned to my bosom. The office boy Rais was instructed to deliver these newspapers to my house after the hostel residents had read them. It did not matter if they were several days old; that did not discourage me. The left-leaning *Daily Mirror* carried stinging editorials championing the rights of Britain's working class. If such editorials were printed here and now, the daily would definitely be banned and the editor would be lucky not to be detained.

My main interest in *The Malay Mail* was in letters to the editor, in particular, those by 'A Malay', Padi M. Krishnan and 'Klyne Street', whom I wish I had had the privilege to meet. 'A Malay' drew the readers' attention to Malay rights, which were openly being robbed by 'others'. Why were the British, entrusted with the task of grooming future Malay leaders, watching these unhealthy developments with folded arms? When would the British Government increase the number of higher-ranking civil service positions for Malays? Why were they reluctant to employ more Malays? It was fortunate that 'A Malay' wrote to the English press because many English-educated Malays shunned the Malay newspapers.

Some did not even want to be seen carrying a Malay daily, which they felt were only fit to be read by *kampung* Malays, who were considered country bumpkins.

I laud Padi M. Krishnan, who vehemently criticised the exploitation of Indian workers by their employers, the British Government included. He quoted an incident where several Malay Regiment platoons were deployed to Batu Arang to ‘control’ iron-mine workers, when all the workers had demanded were a fractional wage increase and better housing. More often than not, Krishnan’s articles revolved around reasonable wages, better housing, a day off for shop-assistants, and security for non-pensionable workers. If Padi M. Krishnan is still alive, he should be assisted if he needs help. If he is no longer with us, a memorial should be erected to remember his efforts, through the press, to improve the living conditions of his lot at a time when he could have easily been ‘sent home’ by the British colonialists.

‘Klyne Street’ was probably a lawyer as Klyne Street in Kuala Lumpur housed many legal offices. Just as ‘A Malay’ had drawn my attention to Malay politics and Padi M. Krishnan to the plight of Indian labourers, ‘Klyne Street’ widened my horizons to encompass international politics. But sad to say, ‘Klyne Street’ did not write for long; his noble intentions were snuffed out by the British. I still remember his last article on different categories of ‘colonialists’ and ‘colonised peoples’.

Writing to the Press

The ‘General Orders’ forbade Government Officers to contact the press or to write on issues related to the Government. But keen to contribute, I investigated the possibility in depth. The *Malay Mail* editor, a local, assured me that he would print my contributions under a pseudonym, but my address had to be genuine. He promised confidentiality, but would divulge names, if forced to do so, on one condition. That was that the British Government must provide a substantial sum of money for the express purpose of defending his contributors, should they be charged in court, and also to compensate them, should they lose their jobs as a consequence. Nevertheless, I put my job on the line and wrote to the Malay press under the pseudonym Mebah. Social, economic and political developments in Malaya in the 1930s were too exciting for me to not join the polemics.

‘Serdang Rooster’s Definition’

In the 1930s, Chinese immigrants were beginning to articulate claims that their forefathers had set foot in Malaya earlier than the Malays. They were

attempting to assert themselves as the rightful owners of this land. Like other Malays, I was deeply affronted. Did they forget that when the British landed on this land called *Tanah Melayu* (The Malay Land), there already existed a flourishing Malay system of government, with Sultans, Rajas and Chieftains? The British, through the East India Company, had signed various treaties with the Malay Rulers. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, this Malay Land, the same one the British chose to call Malaya, belongs to the Malays.

As a result, the definition of 'Malay' was of paramount importance. A heated discussion ensued in the Malay press. According to Abdul Rahim Kajai, the prolific Malay writer, according to natural law a 'Malay' was defined by the race of his or her father. In an article entitled 'Serdang Rooster's Definition', I wrote that if the pedigree of a mere rooster was thus defined by natural law, this should also apply to humans! My letter was well received. A spokesman from the Pahang Malay Association agreed with me, but would not impose this definition on his association's membership.

A Scare

Every year twelve scholarships were allocated to Malay Diploma Course students at the School of Agriculture, but a certain Board Meeting had proposed to halve this, with the rest going to non-Malays. The British Protector of Chinese naturally supported this proposal, expounding that "even though the lion's share should be for the Malays, non-Malays should not be neglected." My boss, Mr Mann could not do much as he was under the supervision of Dr H.A. Tempany, at that time Director of Agriculture for Malaya.

Realising how disastrous this would be for Malay students, I put my job on the line by leaking this information to *Majlis* in the hope that the Federal Council's Malay members would protest, but not one uttered a word. Shortly after, the leak was brought to Mr Mann's attention by the *Malayan Agricultural Journal's* editor, also a white man. I denied my involvement when questioned by Mr Mann. The Malay students also kept their mouth shut as tightly as clams. The investigations then moved to the Department of Agriculture's Publications Unit, where the staff also had access to the minutes of the confidential Board Meeting.

The source of the leak was never discovered. What a relief! I could have lost my job. Would the Malay press also ask the British Government for funds to defend its contributors, like *The Malay Mail* would? I was nervous throughout the investigations. I was unprepared for the suspicion

and interrogation. I thank God for safeguarding me and my family, but I regret that the scholarships for Diploma Course Malay students were halved as proposed.

Books that Politicised Me

In addition to buying books from bookstores and ordering them from publishers, I received books from the Left Book Club in England for a 25-shilling annual membership fee. These books had red covers or jackets while books from the Right Book Club were blue in colour. That was my formal introduction to politics; words once vague were now fully explained. They included: left, right, Conservative, Tory, liberal, socialism, labour, communism, colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, colour bar and segregation. The books opened my eyes to the many cases of corruption in England, inside and outside the Government; the exploitation of coal-miners; subsidy abuse and the oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful.

My part-time job as a Malay-language tutor to newly arrived British Officers deepened my understanding of current affairs. Dr Brown, the Scotsman, recounted to me how his father, a Public Works Department Engineer in Egypt, had resigned soon after Egypt gained self-government, disgusted with developments around him. Most contracts, he said, were secured by Jews, but Armenians were even more wily. He quoted an example where Armenians negotiated with a Public Works Minister to construct an esplanade, but used poor quality materials, causing the esplanade to wash out to sea not long after. That was the fate of a new nation run by dishonest politicians.

The Left Book Club also sold selected books at reduced prices to members, once a month. They included liberal translated books from France on world politics. My assistant had hidden many of these expensive books in the ceiling of my house in Serdang when World War II broke out. I am sure they are still there, although probably ravaged by time or termites. Among the books I read were *Red Star Over China*, *Glimpses of World History*, *An Outline of World History*, *Inside Europe*, *Theories and Practices of Socialism* by Major Woodrow Wyatt, whom I later had the privilege of meeting, *Mein Kampf*, books by George Bernard Shaw, books on the French Revolution, on the Young Turks and the biographies of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Lenin and Stalin.

The Young Turk movement appealed to me immensely, especially the remarkable Father of Modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and his crusade against European domination. He had won recognition for his

reckless courage while fighting against the Italians in Tripoli. In World War I, he distinguished himself in the defence of the Gallipoli Peninsula against the Allied Forces. Mr Mann, who had seen action in World War I as a British Captain, had narrated stories of Turkish valour. "No one race in this world is braver than the Turks!" he said.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk steered his country from oppressive feudalism to a modern republic. When he banned the fez as unsuitable for modern Turks, Malays in Malaya began to discard the headgear they had once been so proud of. In pursuing a policy of modernisation, Mustafa adopted the Latin alphabet. A free nation should not use the script of its former colonisers. Turkish women were given the right to vote and to stand for elections; a woman was no longer her husband's property. Turks were also not encouraged to perform their pilgrimage in Mecca from 1918 until its economy recovered in 1946.

I was also moved by Mahatma Gandhi's selfless sacrifice in South Africa and his 'passive resistance' against government enactments. After his return to India in 1914, he succeeded in moving the Indian masses to rise against the British, using a weapon never used before, that of 'non-violence and civil disobedience'. In 1934, he began trekking on a 200-mile march with only 78 followers, but ended up with determined thousands. Gandhi, his wife and followers were whipped and tortured, but that did nothing to their stalwart spirits. I still remember his acerbic words to judges, legal officers and Indian Civil Service Officers: "God, save my mother India from these people who are nothing more than careerist politicians."

Gandhi was one fighter the British could not tame with the usual array of bait – titles, riches and women. He wore no shirts on which medals could be pinned; money was pointless to him as he had simple needs; and beautiful women meant nothing as he had openly declared celibacy. I was distraught to hear that his life was ended by a bullet at a time when India was on the threshold of Independence.

Another Indian leader I admired was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who, despite a wealthy family background, chose to fight for the downtrodden in the name of 'country and people'. *Glimpses of World History* is an extraordinary chronicle by an Asian who had mastered the English language magnificently. This incredible history book, written in detention, is an unforgettable collection of letters to his daughter Indira. Stories of the tortures meted out to him in detention brought tears to my eyes. To a nationalist like me, this book by Nehru was like a bible of nationalism. Why? His philosophy "A healthy person or nation thinks about its past, but acts for its future," is a reflection of his sagacious outlook.

On the other hand, *An Outline of World History* was written by a British citizen. He wrote candidly, even when it concerned the British.

The countless newspapers, magazines and books I read in the nine years I served at the School of Agriculture stoked my nationalistic fires and moved my soul. If I was once just ‘opening my eyes’ to developments around me, I had now become highly sensitive to them. I was learning to examine and analyse every political, social, and economic event, especially those that touched the Malays.

Early Politics: Nationalists of My Land, Unite

I am one of tens of thousands of Malays born at the dawn of the twentieth century. It was, for us, a century for pursuing knowledge, for national awakening and agitation for Independence.

As a young boy in Matang, I encountered four white faces regularly – those of Tuan (Master) Alexander Keir, then Matang Malay Teachers' College Principal; the District Police Officer and two estate managers. Whenever we met on the street, me on my bicycle and they in either a buggy or a car, I was always the one to jump off my bicycle to politely make way. These white men looked formidable and gigantic, but they always flashed a smile at me.

A book by the early Malay scholar Munshi Abdullah that I read while in the Malay school mentioned how a Malay subject had to prostrate and bow his head on the ground – even if it touched a heap of cow dung – as a mark of deep respect for any Sultan he would come face-to-face with. After leaving my Malay school, I did not forget to ask a friend about this. Much to my relief, he answered, “That was a long time ago; it is different now.”

My brothers and I were exposed very early in life to the legendary tales of Melaka's Malay warrior Hang Tuah and his four devoted friends, Hang Jebat, Hang Lekir, Hang Lekiu and Hang Kasturi. The tragic tale ended with Hang Jebat dying at the hands of his beloved friend Hang Tuah, immortalised as an exemplary Malay warrior for his absolute loyalty to the Sultan, even though he was treated unjustly. Hang Jebat was on the other hand pictured as a traitor. Today (1976), the Malay right continues to hero worship Hang Tuah, while the Malay left lionises Hang Jebat for sacrificing his life in the name of friendship and justice.

While at the English school, I read about the adventures of Sherwood Forest's Robin Hood, Little John, Friar Tuck and Maid Marion, who championed the rights of the poor against a wrathful, heartless and unscrupulous lord. I also read about the four French brothers, Athos,

Porthos, Aramis and D'Artagnan, who fought for the palace. Their pledge of "One for all and all for one," touched me deeply.

French Revolution stories recounted French peasant uprisings against avaricious aristocrats who levied taxes at their whims and fancy. Consequently, the guillotine, which once separated peasants' heads from their bodies, was later used on the nobility. Unfortunately, these revolutionaries were not ready to govern and the revolution went to waste, leaving peasants impoverished and the feudal lords back in power.

Stories of the Pahang Uprisings helped me understand why Pahang Malay freedom fighters challenged British authorities, even though the British Government was supported by Indian Sepoy troops. These patriots had to retreat in the end, first to Trengganu, then to Kelantan and, finally, Thailand. The Sultan of Kelantan is commendable as he was brave enough to have denied to the British Governor that the fugitives were hiding in his palace. In 1974, they returned to Pahang.

The best-known Pahang Malay hero, Mat Kilau, was buried in Pulau Tawar in Pahang, while another, Tok Guru Peramu, is still alive. At the time of this writing (August 1976), he is no less than 135 years old. According to a friend from Pahang, this fighter takes his bath with water kept in nine different earthen jars. His helper only needs to refill three jars. No one knows who keeps topping up the rest. It was said that when a car from Negeri Sembilan came to take Tok Guru Peramu from his house, rain fell so hard that flash floods forced the plan to be abandoned. Some people believe Tok Guru Peramu is the legendary anti-British Malay patriot, Datuk Bahaman. The same friend told me there is a way to prove it. "If Tok Guru Peramu can cook a pot of rice on the sole of his foot and can walk on the Pahang River, he is indeed Datuk Bahaman, (the) British's biggest adversary."

From listening to and reading these local and international stories, as an easily influenced Malay youth, I was deeply inspired to liberate the homeland that Allah had generously bestowed on my race. If I am asked who among the Malay fighters I'd like to emulate, two names come to mind; the late Datuk Abdullah bin Haji Dahan, the Undang of Rembau, one of the component states of Negeri Sembilan, and Enchik Mohd Eunus bin Abdullah from Singapore.

Datuk Abdullah bin Haji Dahan, the Undang of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan

A son of a Negeri Sembilan Datuk in Rembau, Abdullah had studied in a Malay school before passing his Senior Cambridge examination with

flying colours at the renowned Malay College. Among the many elected members of the Federal Council, he was the most vocal, especially on issues related to Malay rights. He once openly questioned the British for employing non-Malays in Government Offices. The British conveniently replied, "Because there are no English-educated Malays." Yet, right from the outset, it was the British Government's policy not to encourage Malays to attend English medium schools.

Datuk Abdullah fought solely for the Malay cause. He demanded that the British allocate more Malay Reserve Land and provide more employment for Malays in government offices monopolised by foreign races, such as the Malayan Railways, Posts and Telegraphs, and Public Works Department. He admitted that many Malays were employed in low positions, but what about senior posts such as Station Masters? Why were the Malays not entrusted with more responsibility? When the crippling 1929 Depression forced the British to retrench workers, Datuk Abdullah issued a warning to the British 'not to touch' Malay employees. Having suggested that immigrants be dismissed first, he was, needless to say, unpopular among the Chinese and Indians.

I take my hat off to Datuk Undang Rembau, a most courageous man, vocal in the 1920s and 1930s, when almost no one else dared to speak up against the British. Datuk Undang Rembau was apparently sent out of the Council by the British on the excuse that he was suffering from a nervous breakdown. The British thus succeeded in getting rid of a thorn in their side! I pray his deeds are well remembered by the Malays and that Allah blesses his soul.

Mohd Eunus bin Abdullah from Singapore

The late Mohd Eunus bin Abdullah was educated in both Malay and English schools. He left government service to take up journalism. His editorials were usually incisive and fiercely committed to the fate of the Malays. He was chosen by the Straits Settlements Government as an advisor on matters related to the Malays in Singapore. With far-reaching influences, he was later appointed a Justice of the Peace (JP). In 1924, he was elected a member of the Straits Settlements Council and was the backbone of many Singapore Malay social and religious bodies. I remember he once lashed out, "I know the Chinese would like to see the Malays leave Singapore island with their bedrolls."

Let me now go back to the immigrant races living in Matang, in addition to the four white men. Indians were favoured by the private sector as they were cheap labour and subservient to their estate masters.

Chinese, still in tails, were largely self-employed as vegetable farmers, sundry shop-keepers and fishermen.

Malays planted rice in low-lying areas. With much fanfare, the British authorities held special ceremonies to bestow tracts of land on Malay rice-farmers, as if they were choice plots. In fact, these were plots rejected by white estate managers. It seemed so easy for the British to coax trusting Malay farmers to move into these worthless plots. Apart from planting rice, Malays were small rubber growers, coconut growers and fishermen.

Chinese and Indians, having arrived from China and India, quickly recognised the value of English education. They therefore competed to send their children to English schools. The British, whom the Malays regarded as advisors and mentors, deceived the Malays in the field of education. Malay children had to attend four years of Malay school before attending English schools in Special Malay Classes while the children of other races benefited by entering English schools straight away. The Malay saying, 'the fence eats the crop' (which it was expected to protect) is most apt at capturing the situation.

The Malay school syllabus was the lowest of the low. Instead of progressive subjects, it emphasised Gardening, Basketry and Handicraft. Therefore, out of the thousands of Malays who left Malay schools, only a few obtained regular employment. In many government departments, there were three aliens to each Malay, while the Railways, Posts and Telegraphs, and Public Works Departments were almost completely monopolised by immigrants.

In the 1930s, political tensions – between the Malays on one hand and the immigrants on the other – were heating up. But the British did not quite know how to handle it. They only knew how to compromise with the immigrants in order to enjoy good relations with India and China, the original homes of these immigrants.

Politics in the 1930s

The early 1930s were years of deep recession, when the prices of primary commodities such as rubber, were at rock bottom levels and the price of rice, the staple food, rocketed sky-high. I was then an Agricultural Assistant based in Tapah, Perak. These difficult years proved to be ideal for moneylenders, especially *chettians* and rubber dealers-cum-moneylenders. The *kampung* Malays under my supervision were restless; some had mortgaged their plots of land, knowing full well a new regulation preventing Malays from mortgaging their lands (often their only assets) would soon be gazetted. They lamented to me, "The DO (District

Officer) can do to me whatever he wants! I cannot bear to see my hungry children cry!" To evade the legal regulations, the *chettians* used middlemen, other Malays, as front men for their official transactions.

The Depression forced the British to slash their administrative expenditure by retrenching employees, freezing new recruitment, halting programmes deemed not urgent, using envelopes several times over, and reducing the allowances of Government Officers. The School of Agriculture in Serdang was almost a victim; it had been built after a hard fight and with a low budget. The British also gazetted a law forbidding Malays from mortgaging their Malay Reservation land to non-Malays.

The political chapter of the 1930s should be opened with the Chinese lion dance, with the aggressive dragon ready to devour a nation. It was a time when the Malays were beginning to be, and needed to be, alarmed by open Chinese claims for equal rights with the Malays. They demanded greater involvement in Malaya's administration including recruitment into the Malayan Administrative Service. They demanded equal rights with the Malays on the grounds that they too considered Malaya their home, and no longer just a place where they temporarily earned a living.

Since 1920, Chinese immigrants had entered Malaya in droves through Singapore, without restrictions by the British. When the Malay rulers questioned the need to bring in foreign labour, the British retorted, "They are necessary to carry out many kinds of work." This influx was a hot topic among the Malays. Politics had reached the *kampung*s at the grassroots level.

Consequently, the number of Chinese multiplied to almost equal the number of Malays except in the five Unfederated Malay States of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Johore. Some Federated Malay States had more Chinese. The 1931 census in Selangor and Perak further horrified the Malays. The Selangor population was only 23.1 per cent Malay compared to 45.3 per cent Chinese; there were only 35.6 per cent Malays compared to 42.5 per cent Chinese in Perak. Naturally, discussions among Malays in coffee shops and mosques centred on this issue.

In 1931, the Malays received a slap in the face when a Penang Chinese, Lim Cheng Ean, loudly asked, "Who says this land belongs to the Malays?" This highly educated and wealthy Chinese, by virtue of his domicile in Penang, was a British subject, not a subject of the Malay Rulers. That explained his boldness. The Malays could hardly stomach his claims, but the British did nothing. The Malay rulers and elite who claimed the right to administer the Malays seemed to be watching the drama with folded arms. It was therefore up to the common Malays to unite and pledge determination to meet all challenges presented by the immigrants.

Lim Cheng Ean had asserted, “When Captain Light landed in Penang, was he met by the Malays? My ancestors, who worked as coolies, were the ones who opened up the island. Jungles were converted into towns by them. Penang is ours.” Lim forgot that the island was already named Pulau Pinang by the Malays long before the Chinese set foot on it. It belonged to a Malay, the Sultan of Kedah, who leased the island to Captain Francis Light in 1786, when Malay farmers and fishermen were already living on the island. If my memory does not fail me, according to a story I read, the British Governor of Bombay once sent two Chinese men to Captain Francis Light. He was so impressed by their hard work that he asked the British Governor in Bombay to send more of ‘them’. He did not even know who they were.

Emboldened by the Chinese, Indians also claimed they were the ones who had opened up this land. For example, they said they had laid down the roads, railway tracks and planted rubber. They too wanted rights equal to those of the Malays. In short, both the Chinese and Indian immigrants were openly challenging Malay pre-eminence.

In his autobiography, *Riwayat Hidup Aziz Ishak* (The Life of Aziz Ishak), the former Minister of Agriculture wrote that his forefathers, Jenaton and brothers, together with 180 followers, had sailed from Tanah Minang in West Sumatra, Indonesia, to Kedah in Malaya. Having made some money from the sale of Qur’ans in Kedah, they presented themselves to the Sultan of Kedah, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin II, and requested some land in Penang. With His Majesty’s grace, they obtained a piece of land in Penang, running from Gelugor to Batu Uban. This was in 1759, 27 years before Captain Light leased and opened up Penang. This goes to prove that Penang belongs to the Malays.

The Role of the Malay Press in the 1930s

Malay publications – such as *Al Ikhwan*, *Lembaga Melayu*, *Saudara*, *Warta Malaya*, *Majlis*, and later, *Utusan Melayu* – were at the forefront in countering claims made by the immigrant races, especially the Chinese. Malaya belonged to the Malays, they screamed! The main thrust was the argument that when the British landed in Malaya, this land already had a Malay system of government.

Prior to these vocal claims by the immigrants, especially by the Chinese, Malay journalists and editors were exceedingly careful about each word they wrote for fear of being ‘invited’ by the Police Special Branch Chief. But in the face of this onslaught, they vociferously defended Malay rights from being violated by the Chinese, at the risk of losing

everything. The Malay papers gave an apt example, "If a carpenter is commissioned to build a house for someone, and is paid by the owner when the work is done, what right has the carpenter to live with the owner in the house that he did not own? He has already been paid, hasn't he?"

Groups of Jawi Peranakan, people whose fathers were mostly Indians in Penang or Arabs in Singapore, usually rich and influential, also put forward the same claims as the immigrants. They demanded the opening up of the Malay Administrative Service as they claimed to be Malays by definition. In truth, only the poorer of these Jawi Peranakans, who suffered the same fate as the poor Malays, had assimilated with the Malays.

These assertions prompted the Malay press, such as *Utusan Melayu*, under the leadership of Abdul Rahim Kajai, to clarify that Jawi Peranakans were not Malays in the true sense of the word. Those with Indian forefathers were termed Darah Keturunan Keling (DKK), or of Indian ancestry, while those with Arab ancestry were Darah Keturunan Arab (DKA), or of Arab ancestry.

The Malay press went all out to inspire the Malays to unite, to uphold Malay pre-eminence and the sovereignty of their homeland. Some called on the British to protect Malay rights, reminding them that the Malays were not "wild beasts to be hunted down by the immigrants." They also described the Indian claims as baseless; their hard work had already been compensated for with wages! This war of words would have continued had Japanese forces not invaded Malaya.

The Malay elite and bureaucrats, whom the common Malays hoped would support the Malay cause, seemed to play dumb. If steps were not taken quickly, the Malays would end up victims in their own homeland. It was amidst these claims and counter-claims that a truly left political party, with anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism as its objectives, had to emerge. It had to be nationalistic and republican in spirit; these were, indeed, the secret aspirations of the political body to be formed.

Personally, I hoped this political body would constitute a vehicle to free my homeland from the shackles of colonial rule, and to propel Malaya into a new era when the people would enjoy freedom and independence. It should be radical, encompassing a wide spectrum of progressive nationalist tendencies, unlike the existing Malay Associations of Perak, Selangor and Pahang, which were not only narrow minded, but pro-feudal and pro-colonial.

Political Conversations, Clandestine Meetings

Reading books (from the Left Book Club and those borrowed from European acquaintances) and daily newspapers (from Malaya, England and India) made me an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politician. My main objective was to gain *Merdeka* (Independence).

At the School of Agriculture, I interspersed my formal lessons in class with political thought and theory, not only to Malay Certificate Course students but also to mixed Diploma Course students. Slowly, I opened their eyes to politics. These students, regardless of race, began to open their eyes to developments around them, as if I had administered a 'wake-up' tonic to their minds. Of the many who enjoyed my unofficial lessons were Haji Muhammad bin Nasir (later Datuk, Chief Minister of Kelantan) and Enchik Wan Abdul Aziz (later Chief Minister of Pahang). Both have explicitly acknowledged that I was the one who spurred them on towards successful political careers.

When my political sermons reached Mr Mann's ears, he wasted no time in summoning me. I had once been questioned for contacting the press. This time, however, I admitted to giving political sermons in class, but claimed that they were meant to arouse student interest in world politics. Mr Mann delivered a long lecture on my teaching role at the School and his appreciation for my fine performance. After that, he simply told me, "Stop talking politics in class!" As an aside, he added, "If you have some free time, it is better that you teach them Greek or Latin." The meeting was concluded with a small warning, "Mustapha, you have a bright future. You are keen as mustard, and you are good at what you do. Let this matter end here. Don't force me to open a new file on you."

Apparently, a student whose political ideas clashed with mine had reported the matter to him. Forbidden to talk about politics in class, I had no choice but to venture off campus. I could not stop. Everything I saw and heard around me was political. For example, I happened to see a labourer – who had stopped repairing a fence to have a drink of water at a public tap – being severely reprimanded by his white boss as if he

was an unthinking beast. I defended the labourer, but was myself shouted at. Why is the world so cruel to the downtrodden? This was an example of inhumane colonialist attitudes. Colonialism must be destroyed by the working people themselves, as had happened in other countries.

One evening, while eating a plate of noodles at the Bukit Bintang Amusement Park, my heart wept as I heard the lyrics of a song sung by a young woman on a nearby stage. It ran:

Indian boys pray in their temple,
Each carrying a candle,
We are like the grass on the ground,
Stamped upon by others day and night.

The haunting *pantun* (Malay quatrain) was very political, depicting the deplorable plight of the Malays. The composer must have been moved by the fate of his own people; humble folk manipulated by others. Yet, these folk were too helpless to do anything about it. Imagine a patch of grass stamped upon day and night; it first turns yellow, then brown, and finally dies. Those lines accurately reflected the fate of the Malays.

I then recalled another quatrain composed by another Malay soon after the British took over Penang Island. Hundreds of Malays from the mainland Seberang Prai were brought over to the island to clear it. Shilling coins were fired from the mouth of a cannon and Malay farmers scrambled to clear land with *changkuls* (hoes) to gather the coins. With their work completed, they built their huts to begin a new life in the clearings. But not long after, surveyors came to demarcate boundaries and notices were given to the farmers, demanding payment for boundary sites, fees for surveying and drawing of plans. Thus, many farmers were forced to return to Seberang Perai. In bitter disappointment one of them must have composed the following *pantun*:

Penang is a new town,
Captain Light is the Ruler,
Should one recall the past,
Cascades of tears flow down one's chest.

These four lines described so aptly the sad plight of Malays, at first invited and later duped. This is the ugly face of colonialism. "When will we be free from the shackles of British colonialism?" I asked myself.

Exemplary Women of Our Past

The Melaka Sultanate had fallen into the hands of Westerners in 1511 and had remained in their clutches for four long centuries. Colonialists

had come armed to the teeth to seize land that was not theirs. History books remind us not to be duped again. Western colonial masters introduced capitalism and imperialism the Malays knew nothing about.

There was this old story about a ‘Dutch request for land’. It goes like this: A Dutchman had requested for a piece of land from Malays in Melaka, pleading he only wanted one “the size of a cow-hide.” After the Malays had agreed, the Dutch made fine strips out of the hide, and joined them together to form one long string. The length of the string marked the actual boundary of land gained by the conniving Dutchman. On this piece of land, obtained through manipulations, he built godowns to store produce obtained at low prices from Malays for export at exorbitant prices – a perfect example of unscrupulous capitalism.

Therefore, we Malays must unite to rid this country of colonialists, as stated by the Ruler of Aceh, when she met my granduncle Datuk Panglima Nakhoda Taruna, who accompanied Sir William Edward Maxwell to rescue several Dutchmen shipwrecked in Aceh after the Krakatoa eruption. This brave woman had pledged, “I will keep the Dutch out of Aceh. Not even one foot shall set forth on this land.” Finally, in a firm tone, she vowed, “As long as I live, I will work towards keeping them away.”

During the 1883 negotiations which took weeks, the Aceh ruler had advised my granduncle, “Be careful, Datuk, with these ‘clever’ Westerners, especially their words. They are brilliant with words. So, be careful of what you say. One wrong word may cause you to lose a nation, while one right word may gain you two nations!” That was the wisdom of a female Aceh ruler in the 1883-84 negotiations.

Melaka can pride itself as the home of an equally remarkable woman – Tun Fatimah, daughter of Sultan Mahmud Shah. One night she had slipped out of her palace unescorted to investigate the movements of a Datuk. This Datuk, a foreign merchant, had betrayed his host country by informing Western colonialists the secret route to enter Melaka, enabling enemy forces to attack Melaka by surprise. If women of our past had already harboured such strong sentiments against colonialists and betrayers, it is appropriate for us in this time and age to fight to the last drop of our blood to defend our people and nation.

We must oppose capitalism, especially the parasitic kind. Should one of these tiny parasitic seeds latch on to a host tree, one by one the branches and finally the host tree itself will die – exactly what happens when colonial masters exploit their victims. After freeing ourselves from the colonial yoke, the Malays should cut off ties with inhumane capitalist nations who value people in dollars and cents. Immigrants should be given

an opportunity to live among the Malays but they must bear certain responsibilities. History must not repeat itself; there should not be any more traitors like the Melaka Datuk mentioned earlier.

Political Discussions and Debates with Friends

I tried to discuss politics with Malays of my status, English-educated and holding responsible positions, but they were not keen or even vaguely aware of the subject. Next, I discussed Malay politics with Malay Officers in the Malay Administrative Service (MAS), but they too demonstrated indifference and reluctance. Most were too Westernised to be sensitive to their own people's problems. These Malays, the New Elite, constituted a new stratum in the Malay community. They differed from the Traditional Elite who came from noble lineages. Nevertheless, both groups were educated and groomed by the British in the Malay College and it was through them that the British hoped to rule Malaya forever.

The new elite was not related to the traditional elite at all. They had grown up in *kampung*s, but because they came from states which lacked sufficient aristocratic candidates, they were fortunate enough to be able to join the Malay College, a golden rung to high civil service positions. Most had been recommended by Rajas and Datuks. Others were recommended by pro-Malay British officers, for example, the Selangor Resident, T.S. Adams, who had sent many non-aristocratic, but intelligent Malay boys from small village schools to the Malay College.

Attracting the attention of this new elite to Malay politics was like drawing water out of stone. They were leading relatively prosperous lives, holding high positions, living in large houses and earning big pay packets. They were the respected District Officers, Assistant District Officers, Settlement Officers, 'this' Officer and 'that' Officer. These positions entitled them to be addressed as Tuan or Master, just like the white man. That mattered a lot.

Was this not the thirties? The new elite had begun to dress, talk, eat and act like their white masters. They played tennis, attended dancing lessons at dance studios and frequented gala dinners and dances. Some visited cabarets to dance with paid hostesses at thirty cents a dance. Those who did not dance well enough usually waited for certain tunes when the lights were deliberately lowered. Under dim neon lights, they fox-trotted, tangoed and waltzed the night away. They had not a care in the world! One could always sleep in or catch a round of golf on Sundays. How could someone enjoying such a life be expected to be sensitive to political changes around him? How could this person enter the world of

politics with all its obstacles, such as the Malay States Laws and the ‘General Orders’?

I was lucky. Although friends from this elitist group were not keen on politics, they did not keep me at arm’s length. In fact, they liked me going out with them. Not interested in dancing and drinking, I was often their treasurer. Their money was safe with me.

Meeting Youths Who Craved Independence

Although quite unsuccessful in getting my political message across to Malay officers, who could be described as the Malay bourgeoisie, I was not daunted. I continued searching until I found a receptive group – a younger set of Malays not holding high-ranking positions. To discuss politics, which I had mentally absorbed from hundreds of publications, I often travelled to Kuala Lumpur, twenty miles away, to contact Malays I had met while attending the FMS Volunteer Force camps in Port Dickson. I also cultivated new acquaintances, such as Malay students at the Kuala Lumpur Trade School. At the Sentul Railway Workshop, I renewed my friendship with typist Othman Mohd Noor (M.N. Othman) from Tapah Road, with whom I had discussed Malay politics while at the Port Dickson camp. A true *kampung* boy, my discussions with him seemed to affect him deeply.

In Kuala Lumpur, I frequented a Melaka Malay eating stall located within a Chinese coffee shop at the fifteenth milestone where many Malay labourers or subordinates ate. There I met Sulung bin Chik, a Pahang boy and former student of the Kuala Lumpur Technical School, now working at the Malayan Railways. It was there that I also met Bahar bin Abik, an Indonesian from Bawean Island working at the Government Printers. Gaining the attention of one Bawean was like gaining a hundred supporters as most of them lived in a cluster of over-crowded huts.

I later met Idris Hakim, a clerk at the Kuala Lumpur Customs Department. From Sumatra’s Mandahiling clan, his family home was a hut in a cramped little village, much like an Indian Reservation in the US, surrounded by a sea of Chinese inhabitants. Coming from this tiny Malay settlement behind the Kampar Mosque, it is no surprise he became a political agitator.

These friends were collaborators in transmitting my political messages. They were not only receptive, but willing disseminators. One afternoon, they took me to a Malay Hostel in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, where I met many hostelites, such as Badrillah, Kassim, Kundor and Abdul Aziz (later to marry Tan Sri Hajah Aishah Ghani, Malaysia’s

Minister of Social Welfare). Most of them seemed to be fighters. It goes without saying that our discussions focused on the woeful plight of the Malays in their prosperous homeland. At that time, in the 1930s, Malay politics questioned efforts by 'others' to 'seize' Malaya from the Malays.

Political meetings and discussions were held in absolute secrecy. Before the outbreak of World War II, a government servant like me had to be extremely careful in choosing his friends. Many government officers, including senior ones, were under surveillance by both the Police Special Branch¹ and the colonial Intelligence team. The British could not rest easily if they knew the Malays were stirring and becoming politically conscious.

The locals working with British Intelligence were mostly government servants, especially from the Education Office and the Co-operatives Department. They were entrusted with intelligence responsibilities only after undergoing screenings and after pledging absolute allegiance to the British. These Intelligence Officers were then interspersed among other government servants, the Malay Rulers, pilgrims and other groups. Their reward? Special allowances, quick promotion and access to British Officers, for example, the Resident nearest them.

Meanwhile, Indonesian refugees, initially Dutch colonial nationals who had migrated to Malaya for certain reasons (perhaps political ones), were under the surveillance of both Dutch Intelligence and the Special Branch. I therefore had to be extremely careful whom I met with. One afternoon, I came across a man in his early fifties talking in an Indonesian accent to a group of Malay youths. The subject was the global labour movement. This small-built Indonesian, Sutan Jenain, had a magnetic pair of eyes and a humble smile. Unlike the many Indonesian traders and shopkeepers in Kuala Lumpur, Sutan was educated, at least up to middle school, and could converse in Dutch and English. He lived alone, planting pineapples in Bukit Belachan, while his family lived in Ulu Langat, Selangor. His daughter married Police Officer Enchik Abu Bakar bin Baginda, who was later appointed Selangor's first Chief Minister.

We started to hold meetings and lectures on the quiet. The most pertinent question asked: "Why are the Malays dirt poor in their own homeland when it is overflowing with wealth?" Sutan was the first person to enlighten us. He answered very simply, "It is because we are not yet *Merdeka* (independent). A nation is like a fish. If we are independent, we can enjoy the whole fish – head, body and tail. At the moment, we are only getting its head and bones. With independence, we, the nation's own people, can run the country economically, politically and administratively. But first, we must gain Independence." This answer generated many related questions: Aren't the Malays already quite progressive?

Don't we already have Malay Officers holding high-ranking positions? There are already Malay District Officers and perhaps there will be Malay State Secretaries! No, said Sutan, there is much more to be achieved. Only Independence can bring total freedom and prosperity to the people.

When asked to define Independence, Sutan gave a simple answer, "Independence means freedom from colonial rule, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, freedom to live the way we want to, and according to our customs and traditions. In short, we run our own nation." With this explanation, the audience fell silent; their faces reflected many doubts, and fears, even alarm. Some became restless, as if wishing to get out of the meeting, but were too embarrassed to do so. All the discomfort arose from one word, *Merdeka*.

Sutan continued, "Look at America. It used to be a British colony. It is now free. Malaya has been colonised by Westerners for more than four centuries. Free America is now prosperous. The British have no say over its administration and have no right to impose taxes. We in Malaya, Indonesia, India, Ceylon and many other nations in Asia are not yet free!" "Every person in a colony, except those in the good books of the colonial masters, lives in misery, poverty and humility. All the wealth derived from the nation is being exploited by 'them'. Who are the poorest people in Malaya? Are they not the Malays? In Indonesia, it is the Indonesians, except for those feudals groomed by the Dutch; they are nothing more than horses the colonial masters ride on." "How many cents does a Javanese earn working in Dutch plantations? Ten cents a day! We plant the coffee the Dutch make money from! Javanese peasants can only afford to drink coffee brewed from coffee leaves!"

Our secret meetings were usually held in the homes of friends in Kampung Baru. After everyone had arrived according to plan, one would hear a gentle knock on the door. The host would pretend to wonder who was outside, open it and 'be surprised' to see Sutan. We had to do this because as an Indonesian political activist, Sutan was under British surveillance. We had to be discreet to avoid the Special Branch getting wind of our gatherings. We also did that because some friends were reluctant to come if they knew old man Sutan would be present. They did not want to take risks. Some of our friends were not keen on politics, but once inside the house they had no choice but to listen to what went on. It was certainly not easy to disseminate the concept of *Merdeka* in those years. At the end of our discussions, bowls of green-bean porridge were passed around.

Sutan's lectures proved extremely interesting, especially those on Indonesian struggles against the Dutch; how Indonesians, young and old,

left and right, Muslim and non-Muslim, had fought with one aim – to get rid of Dutch colonialists! Sutan used to say, “If you, my friends, begin to see one or two political detention camps being set up by the British that is indeed a sign that political agitation in Malaya is beginning to bear fruit.” “I must warn you that political agitation towards Independence is an undertaking fraught with danger, but let us hold fast to the Malay saying, ‘together, we carry light things in our hands; and together, we load the heavy burdens on our shoulders’. Can we?”

Interested members of the audience asked question after question, for example, “According to you, the colonial masters are blood-sucking exploiters who feed on the wealth of this nation. What steps can we take to get rid of them?” His answer: “That is a very good question. It shows that you have understood our national struggle. We, in Indonesia, have tried for many years to get the Dutch out; the work is hard and involves many sacrifices. We call it *fardu kifayah* (a community obligation), a difficult task that must be shouldered by the people en masse, just like the job of burying a dead person. That is also *fardu kifayah*.”

As a start, he urged us to set up either an association or a union, formed and run by members elected on merit. As many of us were unexposed to political organisations and were ignorant of associations and unions, the old man had to explain the structure of a political body in detail. We were not ashamed of our ignorance because no political books were available in the market. We should have been proud that we were the first group of Malays to get together to set up a political body in Malaya.

Apart from explaining the organisational structure, Sutan expanded on administrative aspects, which he said were more difficult. There should be a central body in Kuala Lumpur, before divisions and branches could be set up in different parts of the nation. Divisions would be responsible for the branches. A liaison body would take on the role of communications with the central body. One of his interesting pointers was to avoid electing a Secretary or Treasurer related to the President or Vice President, but it was fine to elect a President and Vice President from the same family, even if they were brothers.

Sutan often recounted his political activities to try to gain Indonesia’s independence. For example, to counter the oppressive Dutch sugar cane planters, he and his political activist friends caught a civet cat to whose tail was tied dry *lalang* (a fast-burning long grass). When the grass was set ablaze, the mortified civet cat ran wild through the plantation, setting dry sugar cane leaves afire until thousands of acres were destroyed in just one night. “Dutch capitalists were so affected that they returned the land to their former owners at low prices.”

Sutan had an incredible memory, almost like a small walking archive. He could remember the dates of all political events such as the formation of political bodies, conflicts and wars, revolutions in Europe and new changes in governments throughout the world. In fact, he could recall the dates of any political event of significance. He also talked about the misguided revolutions that had cost many lives. He warned us to be cautious and to keep our meetings discreet and to never unwisely show off our political knowledge. We needed to be cautious, not only against detection by the Special Branch police, but also by intelligence agents paid by the British to detect political activists and anti-British elements. One crafty way agents could gain information, he said, was by 'winning' our confidence and then making us 'open up'.

Most KMM (Young Malay Union) members then had little political knowledge. Many words lectured by Sutan – such as imperialism, colonialism, nationalism, communism, capitalism, feudalism, bourgeoisie and opportunists – baffled them. But Sutan patiently explained them over and over again. Luckily for me, I had learnt these terms as a member of the Left Book Club of London.

In our lectures and political discussions, Sutan had not once suggested, directly or indirectly, that KMM be affiliated to an Indonesian body. He did not ever mention *Melayu Raya* (Greater Malaya) or *Indonesia Raya* (Greater Indonesia), or that Indonesia and Malaya should become one. In fact, he had stressed that Indonesia's political climate differed from Malaya's, and what was appropriate for Indonesia need not necessarily be good for Malaya.

I was closer to him than most KMM members. It seemed unlikely that he did not aspire for Indonesia and Malaya to grow under one umbrella. But he never once suggested that our political movement in Malaya be directed towards that aim. If he mentioned Indonesia as an example, he did not exaggerate Indonesia's maturity and belittle Malaya's efforts. In short, although KMM was such a baby, he never once belittled our anti-colonial fight and struggle for independence. We did not allow him to attend our formal KMM meetings, but he would still come. He was happy even if we asked him to stay outside the house as a lookout for undesirable elements. At times, I would ask my five-year old daughter Ayesha to play under the house. If someone were to approach the house, she was to quickly rush upstairs to warn us. Needless to say, our cars, motorcycles and bicycles were all parked in different places away from the house.

In 1946, shortly after my release from British detention at the Batu Gajah Prison, Sutan met me in Kuala Lumpur. We were cycling to some

place. A political supporter at Sutan's suggestion had donated the bicycle I used. Somewhere in Kampong Baru, we noticed two boys in a fistfight. Sutan jumped down from his bicycle and approached them with some words of advice, "Do not fight. It is not good. You will get hurt. And your parents will get upset." The kids looked shyly at him and left. At another spot, he suddenly braked his bicycle, jumped down and picked up a tree branch lying across the road. "We don't want children to get hurt by this," he said as he threw it into a drain.

I was told the British deported this old man during the Malayan Emergency (1948-60). He lived with Ibrahim Yaakub @ Drs Iskandar Kamel in Indonesia until he died of old age. During his final years, he helped maintain a mosque.

Note

1. According to Noel Barber in *The War of the Running Dogs* (Wm Collins, Glasgow, 1971: 147), the Special Branch (SB) was a "little like the British M15, and bears some similarity to the CIA, though without its wide powers, and never setting up external spy networks." Until 1952, the Special Branch in Malaya was part of the CID (Criminal Investigations Department). General Templer split the SB from the CID, "though for the purposes of administration it remained part of the Police Department." Barber noted that the SB was "answerable to nobody, and nobody knew what it was doing."

KMM: The Young Malay Union (1938)

The KMM, or Young Malay Union, was founded by a group of radical left nationalists in their late twenties. Influenced by world events, and in particular, by political events in Turkey, these nationalists desired a political body similar to the Young Turks. The word ‘young’ did not preclude acceptance of members of any age group so long as they were ‘young in spirit’. KMM wished to enter the arena of local politics as the saviour of *nusa dan bangsa* (country and people) before the axe of destruction could annihilate them. Homeland *Tanah Melayu* (The Malay Land), with Malays as its rightful owners, has already been renamed Malaya by the British, with ‘Malayan’ nationals about to inherit what Allah had bestowed on the Malays.

These young nationalists despised every form of colonial oppression. Like other European colonisers, the British, initially accepted as protectors and peacekeepers, had become unbridled oppressors. Through their Residential System, policies were subtly introduced from London without giving the Malay Rulers much voice. One bone of contention was the British policy of allowing tens of thousands of ‘others’ into Malaya. To administer Malaya, the British colonialists brought in educated foreigners from Ceylon, India and Hong Kong. To help them exploit Malaya’s economic wealth, they introduced uneducated workers from China and India. To maintain security, they imported troops from India and Burma. Why did the British not employ more Malays in both government and private sectors? Given a chance, they too would have proven progressive and capable! British excuses that Malays were unqualified and lazy did not hold water.

On top of that, British educational policies were not formulated to help Malays gain better employment. In the 1930s, Malays only numbered 16 per cent of students in English schools in the Federated Malay States. Malays were, in effect, merely ‘educated’ to become traditional farmers and fishermen whose lives would just be a fraction better than their

parents'. Let me quote a British official's statement in the 1920s: "The aim of the Government is not to turn out a few well-educated youths, nor a number of less-educated boys; rather, it is to improve the bulk of the people, and to make the son of a fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him." The Malays lagged behind in all fields, yet socio-economic policies introduced by the British were not designed to touch Malay lives, especially 'lower-rung' Malays. They were left to carry on with their traditional lifestyles. No efforts were undertaken to improve the Malay peasants' miserable standard of living.

We, the 'progressive youths', were fully aware that the British could not be depended upon to upgrade our socio-economic status. In fact, the British were quickly learning to evade the issue of Malay dominance (*Ketuanan Melayu*). We felt that if Malays united under the KMM, we could act to assert our rights. KMM could not only ensure peace, prosperity and security in the country but at the same time uphold Malay pre-eminence and birthrights. In short, KMM would be the saviour of the Malays in their homeland.

From February 1931, the Malays had begun to be suspicious of Chinese immigrants when Penang Legislative Council Member Lim Cheng Ean boldly challenged, "Who says Malaya belongs to the Malays?" The Malay press answered this challenge vociferously, while individuals responded by forming Malay associations in Perak, Selangor and Pahang.

The Malays were, however, less alarmed by the presence of the Indians and the Ceylonese. These two nationalities were only seen as 'birds of passage', unlike Chinese immigrants who had become interested in staying on permanently. Nevertheless, these two races were still looked upon negatively as 'robbers' of employment in both Government Departments and estates. It was Malay labourers who cleared thick jungles to plant rubber seedlings in British estates, but when it was time to tap them, they were replaced by bringing in Indian labourers. In the Malayan Railways, positions – right from the highest position of Stationmaster to the lowest position of Porter – were monopolised by Indians. Datuk Undang Rembau tried to remedy this social malady, but his efforts died with him.

Even sadder, Malays could not count on the educated Malays to fight their case as most members of the new Malay elite had become Westernised. Thus, lower-rung Malays were helpless to defend their lost rights and could do little to halt the economic onslaught by others. Leftist

Malays within KMM hoped to unite the entire Malay population in 'passive resistance' similar to Gandhi's, or, should KMM receive support from student bodies, move in 'active resistance' like Burma's Thakin.

With such noble intentions and aspirations, KMM was founded in April 1938¹ at a meeting held at the home of Hassan Haji Manan along Jalan Pasar in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the Federated Malay States. The KMM's formation was one of the earliest organised efforts by Malays to disseminate political ideas. The founding members of the KMM included Ibrahim Yaakub (a Malay school teacher turned journalist) from Kerdu, Pahang; Mustapha Hussain (a lecturer at the School of Agriculture of Malaya in Serdang, Selangor) from Matang, Perak; Hassan Haji Manan (a Malay school teacher) from Selangor; Abdul Karim Rashid (a Malay school teacher) from Selangor; Onan Haji Siraj (a Technical School certificate holder) from Ipoh, Perak; Othman Mohd Noor or M.N. Othman (a Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, Central Workshop clerk) from Tapah Road, Perak; Sulung bin Chik (a Technical School certificate holder and Subordinate Officer in the Railways Department) from Pahang; Bahar bin Abik (a Subordinate Officer at the Government Printers, Kuala Lumpur) from Kuala Lumpur; Idris Hakim (a clerk in the Customs Office, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur) from Kampar, Perak; Abdullah Kamil (a journalist) from Kuala Lumpur; Abdul Samad Ahmad (a journalist) from Selangor; Mohamad Salehuddin (a journalist) from Kuala Lumpur and Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) (a magistrate-turned-journalist) from Pahang. Most of these active members were Malay-educated, but a few had attended English schools.

Ibrahim Yaakub was elected President, proposed by Hassan Haji Manan and seconded by Abdul Karim Rashid. I was made Vice President, proposed by Sulung bin Chik and seconded by Bahar bin Abik. The Working Committee members were:

Secretary I: Hassan Haji Manan
Secretary II: Othman Mohd Noor (M.N. Othman)
Treasurer: Idris Hakim

The other Central Committee members included:

Abdul Karim Rashid
Bahar bin Abik
Sulung bin Chik
Onan Haji Siraj
Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako)
Abdul Samad Ahmad
Abdullah Kamil

I would like to add that the two big names in Malay left politics after World War II, Ahmad Boestamam and Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmi, were not KMM founder members. Ahmad Boestamam only joined KMM just a few months before World War II broke out.

KMM policies were not in line with the Perak, Selangor and Pahang Malay Associations, which were pro-colonial and provincial in outlook. KMM was absolutely anti-colonial and fiercely determined to free the 'Malay Land' from the British grip. The British Government would be pressured to listen to the Malays and a democratic system of government had to supplant the colonialists. As Malaya's first political organisation, its leaders were proud to be the first to use the magic word, *Merdeka*. Appropriately, KMM had a second secret meaning, *Kesatuan Malaya Merdeka*, or Independent Malaya Union, known only to the KMM's inner circle, consisting of just a few members.

Later, in January 1942, this secret meaning shocked Japanese officers when I (as KMM Vice President) and other KMM members (Onan Haji Siraj, M.N. Othman, Hamzah Alang, Abdul Rahman Tambi, Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman, Datuk Wan Daud Ahmad, Saidi Hashim, Kiman, Mohd Mustafa bin Ali, Abdul Kadir Adabi, Hashim Mat Dali, Naning, Zainal Abidin Kassim, Hanif Sulaiman) demanded the Japanese commanders proclaim Malaya's Independence after revealing that KMM's secret aspiration was for Independence.²

I repeat that KMM's primary objective was to uphold the rights of the oppressed Malays, who had long endured the British inability to stop 'the others' from making claims, especially on the delicate question of ownership. KMM would adopt wide-ranging nationalistic principles and strive in the name of *nusa dan bangsa* (country and people). KMM would pressure the British to act. Failing that, KMM would move accordingly, as India, Burma and Indonesia had done. In short, radical and revolutionary thoughts would be activated towards gaining KMM's cherished objective, Independence. KMM had no interest in communism. Even though some of its policies seemed similar to those of several Indonesian political organisations, KMM was not influenced by them.

After KMM's formation, Ibrahim Yaakub and Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) returned to Singapore, where they were journalists.³ With nationalistic fire burning in my heart, I began to carry out my responsibilities as Vice President. M.N. Othman and I sat down to draft KMM's constitution, clearly outlining the name, motto, objectives, policies, and other matters relating to the formation of a union.

Not yet in a position to reveal our political aspirations, KMM was registered as a social body with several features drawn from the Selangor

Indian Youth League. M.N. Othman and I visited the Registrar of Societies, where I paid a \$15 registration fee, then a hefty sum, out of my own pocket. In a harsh and unfriendly tone, the Registrar, a white man, rained questions on us. We kept giving the same plain answers despite his pressuring us for more information on the real nature of the body. We maintained it was a social body to motivate Malay youths in various fields: sports, education, co-operatives, health, agriculture and others. Our immediate plan was to set up a library in Kuala Lumpur where Malay youths in general, and KMM members in particular, could meet, read, listen to lectures and exchange ideas.

Even though registration was yet to be confirmed, we went ahead to set up branches in Kajang and Seremban. In Kajang, a meeting was held at a bookstore where for the first time, I met Saidi Hashim and Mustafa Yunus, a barber who later became a member of the Selangor Executive Committee. After the formation of several branches, M.N. Othman and I were called up by a British Special Branch Officer, who pointed out that we had violated certain regulations and could be fined or imprisoned. I answered that there was nothing wrong in our setting up branches as KMM was a union, and not an association. The white man muttered "Damn!" under his breath and sent us out.

British suspicion of KMM was clear. Several leaders were suspended from work. Our secretary M.N. Othman was suspended for nine months, but that did not deter others. In September 1938, after four months of close British surveillance, KMM was accepted as a legitimate body. Following that, more divisions and branches sprung up in several states. Monthly Central Committee meetings were usually held at the Jalan Pasar home of Hassan Haji Manan, very near the house of Raja Ahmed Hisham, Malay Section Chief of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID). Sometimes, Ibrahim Yaakub came to the meetings, but not Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako), who was outside KMM's inner circle.

'Independence', 'Freedom' and 'Malay dominance' were words that cropped up frequently in our conversations and discussions. But this exhilarating nationalistic awakening among KMM members could not be injected into the veins of the Westernised Malay bureaucrats who felt most uncomfortable discussing Malay poverty and backwardness. KMM resolved to shake them out of their wealth-induced dreams. KMM subscribed to 'Equality, Fraternity and Liberty', principles already preached by Prophet Mohammed *s.a.w.* in his time and again by French politicians in the 18th century. KMM members were already calling each other Saudara ('friend' or 'brother' in Malay), brother, comrade and *ikhwan* ('brother' in Arabic).

At a meeting in Kuala Lumpur, I suggested KMM be galvanised into a mass movement of 100,000 members within three years, to pressure the British more effectively. Where would the members come from? I suggested three sources. One, members of Friends of the Pen Association,⁴ who were facing a leadership crisis. Two, non-supporters of state Malay associations led by the traditional elite and bureaucrats, especially since Malay newspapers had begun to question the Malay elite's sincerity towards their own people. If the purist and nationalistic KMM were to throw its doors wide open, Malay dailies and a new nationalistic awakening would direct disenchanted Malays towards KMM, the 'House of the People'. Finally, KMM would be a natural attraction for the Kaum Muda, or Young Faction, representing the modern, or reformist Islamic school of thought then in conflict with the Kaum Tua, the Old Faction, representing conservative or traditional Islamic school of thought.

I also proposed KMM rent a room near the Bukit Bintang Amusement Park for members to meet in, hold lectures, organise indoor and outdoor games, and publish a fortnightly newsletter *Berita Kemam*, or KMM News. But all my ideas were shot down by KMM President Ibrahim, who insisted that KMM remain small. He may very well have had other ideas for KMM, as would later emerge. When Japan invaded Malaya, Ibrahim made KMM its 'Fifth Column' without consulting us.

At the end of 1939, KMM's first annual general assembly was held at the Gombak Lane Malay School (later the site of Restoran Rakyat) in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. The school, often called 'The School under a Tunnel', is no longer there. This meeting, which brought together members on a nation-wide basis, was quite successful, and KMM made its mark in Malaya. Had KMM been the body that wrestled Independence from the British, the school would be a historical landmark. Alas, it was not to be! Sadly, the 1939 annual general assembly was its first and last.

A few days before the outbreak of World War II, about 100 KMM members were arrested by the British Police nation-wide. Handcuffed KMM members were dragged to local lock-ups before being transferred to Pudu Prison in Kuala Lumpur. When Japanese troops began to make a rapid advance south, these detained members were moved to Singapore, where most were thrown into Outram Prison, while a few were kept in Changi Prison. KMM members were the first to stay in the then newly completed Changi Prison. After they were all released by the British just before the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, British inmates replaced them during the Japanese Occupation. Thus, KMM members were Changi Prison's first inmates.

The Japanese should be held responsible for the arrest of KMM members as it was their Propaganda Department that repeatedly broadcast that KAME would assist the Japanese once they invaded Malaya. In Japanese, KAME means 'tortoise', an animal that only knows how to advance. As soon as British Intelligence decoded KAME to be KMM, they spread their dragnets to rope in KMM members⁵ wherever they were. Ibrahim and Ishak Haji Muhammad were arrested in Singapore where they worked as journalists with *Warta Malaya*, the paper Ibrahim bought with Japanese funds. Others arrested were Hassan Haji Manan, Abdul Karim Rashid, Ahmad Boestamam, Idris Hakim, Sutan Jenain and my own brother, Yahaya Hussain, an active KMM member in Pahang. From Jerantut, Yahaya was handcuffed and dragged, first to Kuala Lumpur, and then to Singapore.

Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmi

Dr Burhanuddin, a giant in Malay left politics, was not a KMM member. KMM only contacted him a week after the fall of Singapore. Ibrahim and I interviewed him before suggesting that the Japanese Military Administration employ him as Advisor on Malay Customs and Religion. Dr Burhanuddin accepted the post graciously. Had he declined, KMM would have brought in Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir, founder of the religious institute, Madrasah Maahad Il-Ehya As-Syariff in Gunung Semangul, Perak.

A remarkable religious figure, Dr Burhanuddin combined the logic of science and Islam most effectively. Before World War II, he was a schoolteacher in Singapore and dabbled in politics from a distance. In later years, he wrote many protest letters to the press on the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, and was once arrested and detained in a Police lock-up. Although not a KMM member, he was very influenced by it.

Initially, Dr Burhanuddin worked in Singapore, but when the Japanese Military Administration for Sumatra and Malaya was incorporated, and its HQ moved to Taiping, so did Dr Burhanuddin. We should commend Hanif Sulaiman, a faithful Taiping KMM member for introducing Dr Burhanuddin to the public in Perak through talks and religious sermons. That made it easy for the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP), the successor of KMM, to gain a foothold in Perak, when Dr Burhanuddin founded it in 1945.

Ahmad Boestamam

According to a statement given to me dated 12 November 1975, Ahmad Boestamam, another great name in Malay left politics, joined KMM a

couple of months before the Japanese invasion. He took over the post of Assistant Secretary from Abdullah Kamil, who had left Kuala Lumpur. Boestamam stated that although he was a member of the daily *Majlis* editorial board, led by Ibrahim in Kuala Lumpur, Ibrahim never once invited him to join KMM, although two other editorial board members (Abdul Samad Ahmad and Mohamad Salehuddin) were.

National List of KMM Members Whom I Knew

Kuala Lumpur

Abdul Samad Ahmad, *Majlis*, Kuala Lumpur
 Mohamad Salehuddin, *Majlis*, Kuala Lumpur
 Ahmad Boestamam @ Abdullah Thani, *Majlis*, Kuala Lumpur
 Mohd Yassin bin Salleh, Malay schoolteacher, Kuala Lumpur
 Hamzah Alang, businessman, Kampung Baru, Selangor
 Abdul Rahman Tambi, clerk, Kampung Baru, Selangor
 Mustafa Yunus, barber, Kajang, Selangor
 Saidi Hashim, book store owner, Kajang, Selangor
 Ahmad, Agricultural Department, Cheras, Selangor
 Hashim bin Mat Dali, Puchong, Selangor
 Ahmad bin Mohd Amin, Agricultural Department, Selangor
 Johar bin Kerong, Agricultural Department, Selangor
 Mohd Rais bin Abdul Karim, Agricultural Department, Selangor
 Ma'arof Hassan, Agricultural Department, Selangor,
 Hamzah Sanusi, Kuala Selangor

Perak

Haji Ariffin bin Haji Hamzah, Kuala Kangsar
 Zainal Abidin Kassim, Technical School student, Kuala Lumpur (son
 of 'Rich Man Pak Kassim' in Tapah Road)
 Mohd Nor bin Abdul Shukur, Ipoh
 Mohd Mustafa bin Ali, Ipoh
 Aminuddin bin Jumain, Ipoh
 Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman, Agricultural School graduate and Malay
 schoolteacher, Perak
 Pak Chik Ahmad, self-employed, Taiping
 Hanif Sulaiman, insurance agent, Taiping
 Mohamad Judin, Agricultural Department, Kuala Kangsar
 Chikgu Junid Mahmud, Malay schoolteacher, Tapah Road
 Haji Mohd Yusof, Batu Gajah
 Ahmad Shafik, Gunung Semanggul

Abdullah Che Dat or Abdullah C.D., Clifford English School, Kuala
Kangsar (the youngest KMM member at 17)
Abdul Rahman Rahim
Mohd Hanafiah Abdul Rahman
Jaafar Sidek bin Haji Din

Pahang

Mohamad bin Baginda Besar, smallholder, Bentong
Yahaya bin Hussain, Agricultural Department (my brother)
Kamarulzaman bin Teh, Agricultural Department, Bentong

Negeri Sembilan

Achih bin Haji Masud
Thaharuddin Ahmad
Zubir Salam

Penang

Putih Badri bin Chek Mat, Al Mashoor schoolteacher
Abu Bakar Mohd Noor, Kelawai
Ustaz Abdul Majid

Kedah

Mohamad Ariff

Melaka

Mohd Isa Mahmud
Ibrahim Endut
Abdul Hamid Abdul

Terengganu

Abdul Majid Haji Mohamad
Ibrahim Tahir
Wan Daud Ahmad (later Datuk)

Johore

Haji Abdul Hamid Fadzil Tahir
Ilias Karim
Musa Haji Salleh, Agricultural Department, Muar

Kelantan

Abdul Kadir Adabi, writer
Ibrahim Mustaffa, journalist

Notes

1. Membership was open to Malay youths, with Malay fathers, who practised Malay cultures and were Muslims.
2. The story of this demand will follow in a later chapter.
3. When KMM was formed in 1938, Ibrahim was deputy editor of *Majlis*.
4. Friends of the Pen Association, or Persatuan Sahabat Pena Malaya (PASPAM), was promoted by the Penang Malay paper, *Saudara*. Founded in 1934, it hoped to encourage reading and writing in the Malay language.
5. After I left my home in Serdang (on sick leave) on 6 December 1941, I was told that a police team, accompanied by the Serdang Experimental Farm Officer, a white man, came looking for me. They were, however, rebuked by my boss, Mr G.E. Mann, who threatened to take civil action for their false allegations against me. Then, British Police Officer J. Birch, who once served in Bagan Serai, Perak was sent to arrest me in Taiping, but the Japanese military's speedy advance forced Birch to retreat. He diverted to Teluk Anson, hoping to arrest Raja Yahaya, a Police Officer absent without leave, but Birch was unlucky to be in the way of the Japanese and was killed.

The First Malay Nationalists

1. Ibrahim Yaakub or Ibrahim Haji Yaakub (IBHY) or Drs Iskandar Kamel¹ or I.K. Agastja:² Founding Member and President

Born in Kerdau, Temerloh, Pahang, in 1911, KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub entered a three-year teacher-training programme at Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in Tanjung Malim, Perak, in 1929 at the age of seventeen and graduated when he was twenty.

In 1975, after 30 years of not seeing each other,³ Ibrahim claimed in a letter to me,⁴ dated 20 May 1975, that he had led a secret student group at the SITC and that Haji Harun Mohd Amin (Harun Aminurrashid), and Malay scholars, Enchik Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad and Enchik Buyung Adil, were among his teachers who knew of it. Ibrahim said he had been intensely influenced by Indonesian political movements. History lessons delivered by teachers – Enchik Abdul Hadi bin Haji Hassan, Haji Harun bin Mohd Amin, Enchik Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, Enchik Nurdin bin Haji Harun, Enchik Buyung Adil and Mr O.T. Dussek – aroused, in him and his four friends strong anti-imperialist and anti-Chinese sentiments, which motivated them to secretly enrol in the then two-year old Soekarno-led Indonesian National Party (PNI) in 1929.

To seek the truth, I wrote to Ibrahim's former teachers who were still alive. Buyung Adil did not respond, while Haji Harun bin Mohd Amin denied knowledge of the two claims. Meanwhile, Dahalan bin Hussain, a student just one year senior to Ibrahim at the SITC, wrote that in those years (1929-31), it was impossible for any student to be involved in a secret movement. It was most unlikely that a 17 year-old student from a remote village in Pahang could join the Soekarno-led Indonesian National Party. Asked about students making contact with Indonesia, Dahalan replied, "One could not even make contact with someone outside the fence, let alone Indonesia. Even teachers were under close watch by certain authorities."

Ibrahim taught at a Bentong Malay school for three years. He also claimed to have been elected then as Secretary of a certain Malay club, with Raja Kamarulzaman as President. He also said that the Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was on his trail. In 1934, Ibrahim was transferred to the Kuala Lumpur Police Depot, where he said he continued to write on Malay politics, which led to confrontations with Police Depot Commandant Mr J.D. Hussey, compelling Ibrahim to resign in November 1936.

Ibrahim said that in 1937, a Malay Youth Association was founded, with him as President, and Othman Mohd Noor, or M.N. Othman, as Secretary. Idris Hakim, Onan Haji Siraj (now living in the US) and Sulung bin Chik (now in Pahang) were committee members. However, in a letter dated 9 November 1975,⁵ Othman Mohd Noor denied the formation of the Malay Youth Association.

In 1938, the year KMM was founded, Ibrahim Yaakub was Deputy Editor of the conservative Kuala Lumpur Malay daily, *Majlis*. In his letter, Ibrahim admitted receiving a sum of money from a Japanese Domei News Agency agent to buy out Warta Malaya Press in Singapore.⁶ This sum of money was taken to Taiping, passed on to Pak Chik Ahmad, who later took it back to Singapore, claiming that it was equity from prospective Malay shareholders in Taiping.⁷ This transfer of money fooled British intelligence. Onan, Ibrahim's brother-in-law, disclosed to me that Ibrahim buried some money under his kitchen in Singapore.

I came to know later that before the invasion, Ibrahim had met a Japanese agent from KAME (Japanese Intelligence)⁸ in Bukit Besi, Dungun, Terengganu. The agent asked him to meet with another Japanese in Singapore.⁹ In Singapore, Ibrahim received a sum of money from Ken Tsurumi, the Japanese Consul-General. Apart from buying over the Warta Malaya Press, Ibrahim bought a new Morris '8' Saloon¹⁰ and expensive clothes. He then travelled all over Malaya. He was photographed riding on the back of an elephant with KMM member Hanif Sulaiman in Batu Gajah. Was the photograph for his Japanese 'boss'? I believe the money was also for KMM, which was 'sold' by Ibrahim to the Japanese to become their tool in Japan's Southeast Asian War.¹¹ Perhaps that explained why Ibrahim opposed my idea to turn KMM into a mass movement.

From 1945 to 1946, when I was imprisoned in Batu Gajah Prison on political grounds, every time I was interrogated, the British Field Security Service Officers kept questioning me about Ibrahim. But the British did not have their facts. They badgered me with the question, "Was the Japanese Intelligence Unit Fujiwara Kikan (not KAME) already in Kelantan (not Terengganu) before the war?"

In early December 1941, several days before the Japanese invasion of Malaya, Ibrahim, Ishak Haji Muhammad and Onan Haji Siraj were arrested by the British in Singapore. Ibrahim managed to secure Onan's freedom by lying to the British Special Branch Chief, Mr L.M. Wynne, that Onan was not part of KMM, but only his brother-in-law. Onan was released, but during one night spent in custody, Ibrahim revealed KAME's secret code to Onan. Ibrahim admitted this in his letter to me.

Ibrahim and other prisoners (KMM and non-KMM inmates) were set free by the British just before Singapore fell on 15 February 1942. Perhaps, the British felt they were no longer able to feed the prisoners or guarantee their safety. After his release, Ibrahim sought me and Onan out at KMM House (KMM had a house near the Fujiwara Kikan HQ at all major stops along the way from Taiping to Singapore) along Malcolm Road, off Jalan Bukit Timah in Singapore.

I introduced Ibrahim to Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, Chief of the Japanese Military Intelligence Unit. This unit was named after him, Fujiwara Kikan, or F Kikan for short. My authority as effective leader of KMM, from the time the Japanese 'collected' me from my father's home in Matang in late December 1941, thus ended on 17 February 1942, when it was handed back to Ibrahim. He was, after all, KMM President and I was only Vice President.

Major Fujiwara handed over a large sum of money for the hundred or so KMM members just released from prison, and for the KMM members who came with Fujiwara Kikan from mainland Malaya. Also, a certain amount of money for the 'mission accomplished' by Onan, other members (especially those from Serdang), and I. Ibrahim and Onan were later seen busily going in and out of the F Kikan HQ with money.

In my recent meetings and correspondence with former KMM members for the purpose of writing these memoirs, not a single KMM member acknowledged receiving any compensation.¹² This abuse was one of the reasons I left Ibrahim and Onan in Singapore. Looting was quite ordinary for the two. They stole and hid my car tyres in their home at 103, Jalan Tanjung Katung, because they knew I could not move without a car. My legs were still weak from a nervous disorder. They wanted to get rid of me and they succeeded.

After handing back leadership to Ibrahim, he rebuked me for two things. First, "Why did you ask Japan to declare Malaya's Independence in Kuala Lumpur? You could have been beheaded!" And second, "Why did you arrest and torture Abdul Rahim Kajai and CID (Malay Section) Chief Raja Ahmed Hisham while in Kuala Lumpur?"

I replied that I had travelled hundreds of miles by car and on foot from Taiping to Singapore in a rain of bullets to free him (Ibrahim) from prison. Was this his way of thanking me? As for torturing Rahim Kajai, I was not responsible for such a heinous crime. I had not even met the man! As for Raja Ahmed Hisham, I did not arrest or torture him. In fact, I was the one who saved his life. Raja Ahmed Hisham was later second in line to the throne of Perak State. His story follows. I knew who had fabricated these lies. So, I asked Ibrahim to investigate the matter before making false allegations against me. I was a responsible lecturer, not a thief or a pirate. After that conflict, my relationship with Ibrahim and Onan began to worsen.

Section 3, page 11 of Ibrahim Yaakub's letter to me stated, "The KMM leadership was revamped in April, 1942, with me as President, Onan as Vice President, with Dr Burhanuddin (new) and others." This is untrue; two weeks after the fall of Singapore, an order was issued to dissolve KMM, and to replace it with a cultural body. It was Ishak Haji Muhammad and I who sat down to write the new cultural body's constitution.

Section 1 of page 12 of Ibrahim's letter stated,

But in July 1942, Japan forbade the extension of KMM – some of us were given employment at Malai-Sumatra Gunseikanbu (Japanese Military Administration for Malaya and Sumatra),¹³ others in *Warta Malaya*, while three others were sent to Japan. Enchik Yusoff Ahmad in Nara, Enchik Othman Mohd Noor and Enchik Abdullah Kamil were posted to Tokyo.... In 1943, the Japanese Volunteer Army, Malai Giyu Gun (Pembela Tanah Air, or PETA, in Malay), was formed. You (Mustapha Hussain) were unwilling to continue. But behind the Malai Giyu Gun mask, we moved to motivate the underground to counter Japan by contacting the MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army), INA (Indian National Army), Chandra Bose and Col Naga, with Soekarno-Hatta in Jakarta, PUSA-Acheh, underground groups in West Sumatra and others.

I will write later about why I was not willing to join the Japanese Volunteer Army, Malai Giyu Gun. But Ibrahim's claim to have activated an extensive anti-Japanese underground movement was incredible. Was it possible for Lieutenant Colonel Ibrahim Yaakub in the Japanese Volunteer Army Malai Giyu Gun, numbering several hundreds, to send messages to Chandra Bose, Indian leader and Chief of the IIL (Indian Independence League)? To Colonel Naga? To Soekarno and Hatta in Indonesia? And then contact PUSA (Acheh Pan-Religious Association) in Acheh? How could he do all that when every communication channel was absolutely controlled by the Japanese?

How could he claim the ability to co-ordinate bodies and individuals with opposing ideologies and aspirations? MPAJA and PUSA at the same time? Both groups had similar aspirations, to get rid of Japan from their homelands, but they were ideologically poles apart. PUSA in Aceh was an Islamic movement – how would it work with the communist-led MPAJA in Malaya? Could the MPAJA ever trust Ibrahim, whom they knew was a Japanese agent? In fact, they would probably tear him to pieces if they had the chance. As for his claims to be in touch with Chandra Bose, Hamzah A. Cunard, an active member of the IIL Military Liaison Division,¹⁴ has this to say from the IIL point of view:

Taiping
December 1975

Dear Brother Mus,

I am very surprised to learn that Ibrahim Yaakub had the temerity to make the claim that our beloved Netaji (the late Subhas Chandra Bose) would stoop so low as to get mixed-up in a plot which Ibrahim Yaakub claimed to have engineered to overthrow the Japanese Government in Malaya during the Occupation.

It is more surprising to note that at the time, August 1943, when Japan was at the zenith of its conquering might that he (Ibrahim Yaakub) was so dissatisfied that he should plot to overthrow the Japanese Government. At that time the Indian National Army under the inspirational leadership of the Netaji was already in Burma preparing for the assault and the conquest of beloved India. Would it be possible for the Netaji to be involved in a plan which would upset his cherished hope of liberating Mother India from its British Masters?

I would like to state that since I was the second-in-command (after the late Pritam Singh) of the IIL (Military Liaison) with the Japanese Forces, I should know more about the Netaji's plans than Ibrahim Yaakub, who stayed put in Syonan (Singapore) and whose movements were closely watched by the Japanese Counter-Intelligence. All this is nothing but the fiction of his highly-inflationary mind. The *kayu-tiga* axis-like arrangement which he said he had brought about with several of his emissaries, is [*sic*] certainly an impossibility, especially in a South-East-Asia occupied by the Japanese and with all the means of communication completely in their hands. His statement that he had connections with Java and Sumatra are all illusions planned to show off to the Malays and Indonesians that he had acted heroically to stamp out Japanese imperialism and which he had also been instrumental in its introduction into Malaya by being a small-time spy before the Malayan War, which has been admitted by him.

If his statement is made known to the people of India and Indians in Malaya and elsewhere, Ibrahim Yaakub would be laughed at in derision. So, don't be bothered by the likes of Ibrahim Yaakub and you should only touch him at the end of a long pole.

Now, about us. Do you remember the times we met at the various fronts as we moved to the South (of Malaya)? I am reminded of the will-of-the-wisp – you were here, there and everywhere. Do you remember – your meeting me with the Japanese cohorts at the Bukit Timah Front where I handed over to you two platoons of Malay soldiers with our blessings?

After so many years of separation (1942-45), we then met again under different circumstances. We were pitched together in one small lock-up in the Ipoh (Central) Police Station, where we shared the little food that we had and struck a spirit of camaraderie that I hope will not end until our dying days. When the Field Security realised that we were birds of a feather (KMM + IIL = bad trouble) we were immediately separated and the best we could do was to exchange glances.

Now, dear brother Mus – you should have the satisfaction of knowing that in my humble and considered opinion that you did your damndest best to blaze the trail for Malaya's independence unlike Ibrahim Yaakub who was a mercenary and fled to Indonesia leaving behind his followers to face the four years of accumulated wrath of the British but not forgetting to carry away the millions which he later claimed to be his and his alone because by acquiring the Economic Degree it was possible for him to acquire wealth quickly, but we are not fools. So dear Mus, this is where I sign off with Allah-Hu-Akbar (Allah is Great).

Yours very sincerely,

Hamzah A. Cunard
11 December 1975

2. Mustapha Hussain – Founding Member and Vice President

3. Hassan Haji Manan – Founding Member and Secretary I

Born in Selangor around 1910, Hassan completed Malay school before entering a three-year teacher-training program at SITC together with Ibrahim. He taught at Jalan Pasar Malay School in Kuala Lumpur and lived in government quarters along the same road. He was probably of Javanese origins. As founding member and Secretary I, his house acted as our HQ; it was fondly referred to as the KMM Club. One typewriter and a Gestetner machine were the only KMM assets. His wife Chik Mah kindly prepared black coffee whenever we met. Hassan was diligent and taciturn. When I was interviewed by CID Chief Mr L.M. Wynne on the setting up of KMM branches, Hassan came along as Secretary I. We were astonished how this white man knew about our movements. Every time we took a step, we were called up to answer questions.¹⁵

Several days before the Japanese invasion of Malaya, Hassan was arrested and first detained at the Jalan Campbell Police lock-up in Kuala Lumpur with other KMM members, but was later transferred to Singapore's Outram Road Prison, where Sutan Jenain was made cook. Released just before the fall of Singapore, ex-detainees were taken to the Japanese commandeered KMM House along Jalan Malcolm on 16 February 1942. Sutan Jenain was again appointed cook, with FMS Volunteer Force Captain Salleh bin Sulaiman, Inspector Hamzah of Kelantan and Ramli bin Haji Tahir as voluntary assistant cooks.

After the fall of Singapore, he lived with Ibrahim in Singapore and served the Malaya-Sumatra Japanese Administration. When the Japanese Volunteer Army, Malai Giyu Gun, was set up in 1943, Hassan was made Captain, or *taii* in Japanese. Hassan had absolute faith in Ibrahim and the pledge "One For All; All For One." When Ibrahim fled to Indonesia in a Japanese bomber upon the Japanese surrender, Hassan went with him. However, Hassan was unable to bring his wife Chik Mah although Ibrahim brought his wife along. Hassan remarried in Indonesia.

Hassan was later appointed Manager of Ibrahim's bookshop, but was dismissed when the business went under. Hassan returned to Malaya in the 1960s to visit relatives and to withdraw his pre-war contributions to the Selangor Government Servants' Co-operative Society. After that, Hassan turned to contracting work. Now, in 1976, he is Assistant Manager of a Bali hotel owned by former KMM member Karim bin Rashid, now a Major General in the Indonesian National Army (TNI). I tried to contact Hassan, but failed to reach him.

4. Othman Mohd Noor or M.N. Othman – Founding Member and Secretary II

Born in Tapah Road, Perak, he was educated in both Malay and English schools. He worked as a typist at the Malayan Railways Workshop in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. We first met when he was a bachelor renting a room in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. Our acquaintance was strengthened when as FMS Volunteer Force members we both camped in Port Dickson.

Othman married Chik Dah, an English-educated girl and daughter of 'Rich Man Pak Kassim', a Javanese community leader in Tapah Road. (Zainal Abidin Kassim, whom Ishak Haji Muhammad wrote "appeared in front of me with a tommy-gun" while Ishak and friends were taking shelter in the Warta Malaya Press after release from prison in Singapore, was Chik Dah's brother. Ishak commended this young man's courage, determination and strong discipline in an article in *Utusan Melayu*. Well done, Zainal! I don't regret taking you to the war front.) A quiet person, M.N. Othman was incredibly efficient and extremely dedicated to KMM's cause. He was the KMM member who helped me with KMM's registration.

In December 1941, M.N. Othman escaped the British dragnet because he was then serving as a volunteer. In January 1942, after Kuala Lumpur fell to the Japanese, he sought me out at KMM House on Jalan Maxwell, and took on the job of Secretary. In the midst of shooting, bombing, clamour, din, threats and shouts of World War II, the calm and collected

Othman steered away from aggression and plodded on at his typewriter. At night, a small rug was his mattress.

In our efforts to give each other family names (Malays do not have family names), like members of the Young Turks, I named him 'O. Setia' for 'Othman Setia'. Setia, 'loyal' in Malay, is a most fitting name for his complete devotion to his friends and the KMM.

In January 1943, when I was suddenly ordered to move south with the Japanese, Othman was left in Kuala Lumpur to manage KMM administrative activities and also to look after several Malays detained by the Japanese, like Raja Ahmed Hisham and Jalaluddin bin Abu Bakar, both CID Officers. Jalaluddin described Othman as 'kind and gentle'. In 1943, M.N. Othman was selected to learn the Japanese language and culture in Japan. When he heard I was writing a book on KMM, he sent me a letter giving details of his harrowing experience travelling to and from Japan:

After an interview by the Japanese Education Department, I was selected to go to Japan to learn first-hand the Japanese culture and language. Together with me were other selected candidates from Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Burma. I left Malaya at the end of November 1943 with my wife and three children (7, 6 and 5) on the Hakone Maru. Most passengers were Japanese troops, with a handful of civilians. Travelling cautiously, the ship managed to avoid enemy attacks from the air and sea. We reached Taiwan safely for a day's stop-over.

Unfortunately, five hours after leaving Taiwan, an air attack hit the ship, causing extensive damage. Soon after passenger evacuation, the Hakone Maru sank. It was a most frightening experience as we had to climb down into tiny lifeboats and then climb up the small ships that had been travelling alongside the ship. The sea was very choppy and the winter cold almost consumed us.

We raised our hands in gratitude to Allah for saving us from drowning. Apart from the three children, whom we held on to with our dear lives, we left the ship with just the clothes on our backs.

After a week in the over-crowded boat, we arrived at Shimonoseki in the freezing winter, in just our tropical clothes. We landed in Moji on 4 December 1943 where representatives from Japan's Welfare Department welcomed us. We were next taken to a small inn, where we had our first shower after 10 days of sailing in an over-crowded boat which lacked adequate water supply.

The next day, we left for Tokyo by train, and were well treated except that we were still in tropical clothes. Arriving in Tokyo on 7 December, those of us with families were housed at Teikoku Hotel (Imperial Hotel), while bachelors were put into a youth hostel. Here, we were given coupons to buy clothes. After five months in the hotel, we moved to a medium-sized house in Minami Tera Machi, Akabane Bashi, Shiba Ku, Tokyo.

In October 1945 (*sic*), the US dropped incendiary bombs nightly, making Tokyo a razed field barren of inhabitants. Allah was our protector. He kept us safe despite fires and bombs razing parts of Tokyo around us. Several days after these incendiary bombings, the US dropped the ghastly atom bombs on

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Two Malay students were killed: Nik Yusoff from Kelantan and Syed Omar from Johore.

The atom bomb brought the end of the war, with Emperor Hirohito surrendering.

After the Americans landed and established an administration, we, Malayan citizens, reported to the Swiss Legation as 'displaced persons', requesting passages home. We were then directed to an American-supervised camp where we received very good treatment, clothes and food. After a week in the camp, we were taken to Haneda airport for a flight on a military plane to Okinawa. After a dinner-stop at Okinawa, we continued travelling to Manila.

In Manila, we were placed in a camp with American troops – here too, we received excellent treatment, with plenty of food and clothes.

A week later, we were put on a British ocean liner heading for Singapore. On arrival in Singapore in November 1945, we were taken to the Syme Road Camp, where we were badly treated. The barracks were dirty and the food unsatisfactory. After a few days in the camp, we were put on a train to return to our homes in Malaya.

Before I conclude, I'd like to clarify certain points:

- i) My trip to Tokyo was not on Ibrahim Yaakub's recommendation as I was selected on my own merit.
- ii) The claim Ibrahim Yaakub made that he set up a Malay youth group with me as Secretary is not true. As far as I knew, KMM was the only body accepted by the people and was registered.
- iii) As for the KMM annual general assembly that Ibrahim Yaakub claimed took place in Melaka in September 1941, it never happened. I was Secretary for the Selangor branch and I know nothing of this supposed annual general assembly.

Back to my memoirs. After my release from British prison in 1946, I had a wife and four children, but no job. In one of my most difficult moments, from his backdated pay M.N. Othman loaned me \$200 in freshly minted dollar notes. It was this money that helped set me up as a food vendor at the Pasar Minggu (Sunday Market) in Kuala Lumpur.

Othman's wife Chik Dah was a remarkable woman, high-spirited and totally committed to the nationalist struggle her husband believed in. In 1951, she and Othman tried to campaign for me when I was named a candidate to replace Datuk Onn Jaafar as UMNO President. But she said the British placed two 'agents' to watch their home day and night. I always enjoyed listening to Chik Dah talking about national politics.

5. Idris Hakim – Founding Member and Treasurer of KMM

Born in Kampar, Perak, Idris was educated in both Malay and English schools. He was a Clerk at the Jalan Brickfields Customs Department. Idris was very committed to our struggle towards independence. I believe he was from the Mandahiling clan, originating from Sumatra. Fair-skinned,

short and plump with straight hair, he was well liked. Like other KMM members, Idris was also arrested by the British, imprisoned and later released. During the Japanese Occupation, he was selected to lead KMM's Economic Bureau, but all that was possible was a sundry shop called The Selangor General Agency in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. After the British returned to Malaya in 1945, Idris was again arrested and imprisoned in Pudu Jail.

Rather than return to begging from the colonial government, he chose to be self-employed by running a small business dealing with rationed items such as rice, flour and sugar. When I was unemployed after my release from British prison, for a while Idris supported my entire family by providing rationed items. I repaid him later. Among my KMM friends, he was very close and loyal to me. He contributed to Indonesia's struggle for independence by publishing a thick, high quality and costly English magazine with lots of photographs. Idris died in January 1974, three days after returning from his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Mecca. His descendants live in Kampung Masjid, Kampar, Perak.

6. Abdul Karim Rashid – Founding and Central Committee Member

Abdul Karim Rashid was educated in a Malay school before joining the SITC in the same year as Ibrahim Yaakub and Hassan Haji Manan. He was a Minangkabau from West Sumatra. While Hassan was tall, Karim was short. While Hassan was dark, Karim was fair. While Hassan had straight hair, Karim had curls. While Hassan was serious, Karim was a romantic fellow. While Hassan worked purely for KMM, Karim worked purely for Ibrahim Yaakub.

Like Ibrahim, Onan, Hassan and Idris, Karim was arrested by the British prior to the Japanese invasion of Malaya and later released like the rest. After the fall of Singapore, Karim stayed in Singapore together with Ibrahim, Hassan and Onan, and served the Malaya-Sumatra Japanese Administration. In August 1943, by chance I met him and Hassan in Ipoh where they were selling Japanese Konan Saiken (Southern Region Reconstruction Lottery) lottery tickets launched that month and priced at \$1 each. While in Ipoh, they took the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. At night, just as he was closing the windows before retiring to bed, Karim was heard singing 'Indonesia Raya' (Indonesia the Great) very softly for fear of being heard by the Japanese. He seemed to be praising the 'land across the waters'. Hassan and Karim were extremely loyal to each other.

I met Karim again in 1943 during the setting up of the Japanese Volunteer Army, of which he was a Captain. As usual, he carried pen and paper, walking behind Ibrahim Yaakub who gave instructions like a film director. For every word Ibrahim spoke, he would write ten. When I asked him the reason for doing so, with a small smile and dancing eyes he said, “Well, one must know what to do if one wants to get ahead.”

In his letter to me dated 13 March 1979, after 34 years of separation, he explained that after the Japanese surrender he left Singapore for Riau, after which he joined the Indonesian National Army as a Major and rose to the rank of Brigadier General. In 1951, he was appointed Military Attaché to Bangkok, Rangoon and Indo-China. After that, he was Indonesia’s ambassador to Cambodia and Laos for seven years before moving on to Manila, also as an ambassador. One of Karim’s adopted children told me that he is currently living a very comfortable life in luxury in Jakarta. Recently, in 1976, he employed his old friend, Hassan Haji Manan, who has been ignored by Ibrahim, to manage his new hotel in Bali.

7. Ishak Haji Muhammad¹⁶ (Pak Sako) – Founding Member

Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) was born in September 1909, in Kampung Segentang, Temerloh, Pahang. He told me that his mother originated from Palembang in Sumatra, while his father was a Bugis from Celebes. Third in a farming family, he entered Malay school in 1919 and completed Standard IV in 1923. In 1924, he joined an English school in Kuala Lipis, the biggest school in Pahang and with boarding facilities. On a Pahang State scholarship of \$10 a month, the very intelligent Ishak passed his Senior Cambridge exams after two double-promotions. He was indeed lucky to have been able to continue at the elite Malay College in Kuala Kangsar, a full boarding school established for the Malay aristocrats and elite children.

After the course, he was an MAS (Malay Administrative Service) Officer and a Magistrate. In Kuala Lumpur in 1935, he was the only MAS Officer who would go to places patronised by the common people, such as public dance stages and opera performances. Recently, when I read his article, I recalled a time when I saw him by a public dance stage at the Merry World Park in Kuala Lumpur famous for its beautiful singer, Miss Kindu. But I did not know him then and decided to keep away.

Then, Ishak left his Magistrate’s position. Selangor Resident T.S. Adam coaxed him to reconsider his decision. He had then taken refuge in a remote house in Kelantan, perhaps to find solace and literary

inspiration. Not long after that, I heard that Isako-san (the Japanese called him that) was nowhere to be seen again. This time, T.S. Adams did nothing. Ishak had actually travelled to Johore, staying at a school where he taught. Not long after, his 'feet itched' again. So, he moved to Singapore, where he joined a newspaper. In 1937, he published two books, *Putera Gunung Tahan* and *Anak Mat Lela Gila*.

After he left Kuala Lumpur and the Merry World Park in 1935, I did not see him for a while. Then, out of the blue, he appeared at the inaugural meeting of KMM in Kuala Lumpur in 1938. After that, I began to see many of his contributions in the Malay press. I did not see him anymore after the formation of KMM until 16 February 1942, just after the Fall of Singapore. He had just been released from a British prison in Singapore. We were together at the KMM House in Jalan Malcolm for a short while, where we worked on the draft constitution of a new Japanese cultural body, Senden-Ka, which the Japanese decided would replace KMM. Soon after that, we parted ways, and I went back to my hometown Matang.

We met again four years later, in 1946, this time when we were active in the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP). He was staying at the MNP HQ in Taiping. We travelled all over the Larut and Matang District to campaign for MNP's struggle for Malaya's Independence. We then parted company, only to meet in Melaka at the end of 1946, after Dr Burhanuddin (President of MNP) returned from India and Burma. At the MNP meeting in Melaka in December, Ishak was assigned to travel to Kuala Lumpur to talk with the Malayan Democratic Union on the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference. (AMCJA: All-Malaya Council of Joint Action; PUTERA: Pusat Tenaga Rakyat, or Centre of People's Power). He was given a meagre sum for expenses. Malayan political bodies then were pathetically poor.

I later saw him in Penang, where he passed on a copy of a well-known document, The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya, to be discussed at the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference. He said very simply, "All assignments have been completed. This is all I could do." This man suffered great hardships in the political struggle to elevate his people and country. I am proud of this true nationalist and freedom fighter. We were together quite a bit at the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference.

After the *hartal* on 19 October 1950, he disappeared again. Although Ishak knew me well through our political activities, he never came to eat at my stall in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, because he did not have the heart to see me eking out a livelihood as a food vendor, living from hand to mouth. After that, he disappeared again. I used to see him about once every three years, or so, but this time, there was a longer break.

When the Malayan Emergency (1948-60) was declared in June 1948, he was arrested and detained. While he was in prison, I wanted to help Ishak's wife, Chik Habsah, by offering her half of my small eating stall for her to sell food, while Enchik Munir Said, a tailor, wished to donate an old sewing machine for her to earn a living, so that Ishak would be in less pain in prison. Unfortunately, Chik Habsah declined our offers. Just before Ishak's release, my friends and I planned to welcome him by bringing him to an open square, where he could give a talk, and perhaps be arrested again, this time with us all. However, our plans did not materialise as Ishak decided to join the British Film Unit.

He then led the Labour Party of Malaya and the Socialist Front. During the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation in the 1960s, he was arrested again, but released shortly after. In 1975, the University of Malaya bestowed an honorary Doctorate of Letters upon him. The next year Prime Minister Datuk Hussein Onn presented him with a \$10,000 award in recognition of his pioneering contributions to Malay literature. Just compare this amount to the pittance he received from the MNP to carry out a crucial party assignment! To me, Ishak is a true Malay Bohemian. Freedom was his main aspiration in life. He was utterly sincere and honest in his struggle for the Malays and Malaya.

8. Onan Haji Siraj – Founder and Central Committee Member

Riwayat Kinta (The Story of Kinta), written by A. Talib bin Haji Ahmad, an Ipoh resident now (1976) living in Pahang, has excerpts which refer to Onan. A. Talib was Secretary of the Perak Malay Youth Association, with Nahar bin Haji Abdul Manan as Treasurer. Onan was the son of a Javanese man who had recently arrived in Malaya. Born in Kampung Jawa, Ipoh, he had studied at the Anderson School. After his Senior Cambridge, he obtained a scholarship for a three-year Diploma Course at the School of Agriculture in Serdang. I was his botany lecturer for a while.

One day, Onan came to tell me that his father had died in a fire at the cinema where he worked. I took Onan to see Mr Mann, the principal of the School. I told Mr Mann that Onan had also been offered a scholarship at the Technical School in Kuala Lumpur. Since his father had died and the scholarship at Serdang was smaller, I suggested that Onan be released with no penalty so that he could take up the other scholarship. He therefore spent only two terms at the School of Agriculture. I met him at KMM meetings, but he treated me as a stranger, not as a former teacher. He showed no signs of gratitude.

He was then already Ibrahim's brother-in-law. Who dared offend him! I also heard KMM members like Mustafa Kamil and Sulung bin Chik complain that their pockets had been inspected by Onan, who suspected some KMM members of working for British Intelligence, or the Special Branch. Onan was arrested together with Ibrahim just before the Japanese invasion of Malaya, but was released after spending a night in a lock-up. Ibrahim lied to the British that Onan was merely his brother-in-law. During the one night in custody, Ibrahim had the opportunity to inform Onan of KAME's secret insignia, a hexagon with the letter 'F' in it.

According to *Riwayat Kinta*,¹⁷ when the Japanese invaded Malaya, Onan played a very important role with the help of his childhood friends. He was recognised as a leader by the Japanese government as he had pledged KMM members would serve as a Japanese Fifth Column. He was the one who said KMM had made arrangements with the Japanese in Bangkok to liberate Malaya. He said Abdul Kadir Adabi from Kelantan had signed an agreement as propaganda to make Malays partial towards Japan. According to the book, Onan was bourgeois and a fascist. After Japan took over Malaya, he moved to Singapore, where he married the adopted daughter of Tengku Abdul Kadir. After Japan's surrender, he had no choice but to flee to Java to seek safety from British wrath.

Let me continue with the story. After Onan met the Japanese military officers at St Michael's Institution in Ipoh, he left for Taiping, where he and several Fujiwara Kikan Officers went to see Pak Chik Ahmad, who knew I was staying with my father in Matang. Onan, Pak Chik Ahmad and several uniformed Japanese officers, armed with swords, rifles and pistols then visited me. Luckily, my wife and children were in hiding across the Larut River. I was 'invited' to go with them to Taiping. I was no coward, but neither was I a fool. The bravest of men would have gone along. Was Malaya not in confusion and at war with the Japanese in control? A Malay proverb advises that "the one without a gun should give way." The story of my movements with the Japanese from Taiping down to Singapore follows.

I loathe writing this negative side of KMM's history, and about Onan, because I knew his family except for the sister who married Ibrahim Yaakub. Onan's mother died disconsolate with her son's unacceptable behaviour. Had Ibrahim not written the 12-page letter accusing me of being an inhumane torturer, I would have allowed these pages from the past to die with me, lost in time. But Ibrahim's letter, with copies to very respectable Malaysian citizens, has forced me to defend my name.

In his 27th column in the 'Reflections of Pak Sako' series (*Mingguan Malaysia*, 18 July 1976), Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) wrote, "Not

long after, Onan Haji Siraj, brother-in-law to Ibrahim Yaakub arrived. His face was red with anger, looking ferocious, shouting and banging the table, angry at us for not maintaining our discipline.” Ishak also wrote that soon after Singapore fell, before the dust of war could settle, Onan had opened “two sundry shops in Joo Chiat. The shops were full of rice, flour and other food, drinks and clothes.”

Onan’s conduct in the course of our move from Ipoh to Singapore was appalling; he was abusive towards other KMM youths. He even threatened to burn the homes of Ipoh youths who refused to move with him. He had little respect for me, his former teacher, because he was the brother-in-law of Ibrahim. When the Japanese were in power, that meant a lot. If his treatment of fellow party members was as described by Pak Sako, just imagine his attitude towards detainees such as Raja Ahmed Hisham, Jalaluddin Abu Bakar, Hashim, Haji Nordin and several Dutch intelligence agents.

After the fall of Singapore, detainee Yusof Ishak (later Singapore’s first president) was rebuked by Ibrahim and Onan for running a rival newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*. Yet for reasons only he knew, Ibrahim accused me of arresting Rahim Kajai. Why should I have hurt the man? He was one of my political mentors and a friend of my brother at the Arabic school in Penang. I do not want to speculate on who laid his hands on the old man. I don’t know, but, it had to do with the fact that Rahim Kajai left *Warta Malaya* to join the people’s press, *Utusan Melayu*. In an article, ‘Kajai Award Tomorrow Night’ (*Utusan Malaysia*, 11 December 1983), Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) explained the conflict between Ibrahim and Rahim Kajai:

Maybe Kajai had heard something and suspected KMM leader Ibrahim Yaakub of being a Japanese spy. He (Rahim Kajai) suspected KMM was a body whose members were Japanese spies. This was not true. Maybe Ibrahim Yaakub was involved, or had connections with the Japanese, but those who knew this were just a few, like Onan, Abdul Karim Rashid and Hassan Haji Manan. Other KMM members, like me, knew nothing about the spying. In 1941, I was an Editor of *Majlis* when that happened. KMM had no connections with other bodies, open or covert.

At the same time, I wondered where Ibrahim Yaakub had obtained the money... to buy the *Warta Malaya* Press from Syed Hussein Alsagoff... I did not investigate the matter as I was living in Kuala Lumpur. Kajai, in Singapore, may have heard something. As *Utusan Melayu* never saw eye to eye with *Warta Malaya*, so Kajai was not on good terms with Ibrahim Yaakub. Because KMM was under the leadership of Ibrahim Yaakub, it was a concern much disliked by Kajai and *Utusan Melayu*.

Back to stories about war detainees in Singapore: among them were Captain Mohd Noor Hashim and Chief Inspector Hamzah from Kelantan.

Onan had instructed KMM member Johar bin Kerong to watch Inspector Hamzah closely, even when going to the toilet. I was told Inspector Hamzah took a liking to Johar and offered Johar his daughter in marriage, but it was not to be.

What would have happened if one of these prisoners had been injured or had died? Who would bear the brunt of responsibility? It would have been me because Ibrahim and Onan had conveniently fled Malaya days after the Japanese surrendered. There was no extradition treaty to bring them back to Malaya. I could be sent to jail or even hanged. I am willing to suffer, even die, for the 'people and country' but what kind of struggle were the two committed to?

I almost paid the price for their misconduct. After the Japanese surrender, Inspector Hamzah tried to persuade other police officers in Kuala Lumpur to act against KMM members, but one of those who attended the meeting asked, "Who saved you from the Japanese? Was it not the KMM?" Inspector Hamzah nodded his head. "Who saved your daughter Rahmah, who was stranded in Johore?" It was KMM member Abdul Kadir Adabi, who looked after Chik Rahmah (now Datin) in the turmoil and confusion.

CID Officer Jalaluddin Abu Bakar, whose life I had saved, interrupted, "If we were to arrest someone from KMM, it would be Mustapha, because Ibrahim and Onan had fled to Indonesia. If we were to arrest Mustapha, we would be committing an injustice. If not for him, our heads would have been separated from our bodies by Japanese swords!" As a result, the meeting adjourned without any decision to arrest anyone. I am still trying to gain documents on that meeting. Jalaluddin has failed to get it for me. I will still try.

9. Bahar bin Abik – Founder and Central Committee Member

Bahar was a Bawean from Indonesia and could only speak Malay. He worked as a Subordinate Officer at the Government Printers in Jalan Brickfields. He was determined and committed to making KMM a popular political body so that his people could benefit from it. He always complained that Onan behaved as if he (Bahar) was responsible for leaking party secrets.

I don't remember if the British arrested him in December 1941, but after the Japanese surrender, he went to Jakarta via Sumatra. He was later active in the Indonesian labour movement, in a body called SOBSI, I think. Later, I heard that Bahar was with Ibrahim. In the 1960s, Bahar came to Pulau Langkawi in Malaya, where he met Pak Chik Ahmad and

handed over some of Ibrahim's political writings to be passed on to university students here. In 1975, he visited Malaysia with Ibrahim, but I did not get to meet either of them.

10. Sulung bin Chik – Founder and Central Committee Member

Sulung bin Chik, from Pahang, worked as a Subordinate Officer at the Malayan Railways. He had served as a volunteer in the Transport Unit of the FMSVF. He was also arrested and imprisoned with other KMM members just before the Invasion and released two and a half months later, just before the fall of Singapore. When the British returned to power in 1945, Sulung left for Sumatra in a junk and worked for the Transport Unit of the Indonesian National Army. After Indonesia gained its Independence, Sulung sought out Ibrahim in Jakarta, but was ignored. He returned to Malaya disappointed. When I later met him in Pahang, he tried to coax me into developing a piece of farmland in Pahang.

Notes

1. Name used by Ibrahim Yaakub after he moved to Indonesia on 19 August 1945 and gained Indonesian citizenship.
2. Pseudonym used in several books Ibrahim Yaakub authored after his emigration to Indonesia.
3. The last time we met was in my hut at Batu 20, Batu Kurau, Perak in August 1945, a few days before the Japanese surrender and several days before he flew to Indonesia in a Japanese bomber.
4. Copies of this letter were sent to then Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, Prof. Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, Prof. Amat Juhari Moain and Enchik Buyung Adil.
5. Othman Mohd Noor, or M.N. Othman, denied this claim. Many claims made by Ibrahim Yaakub in his letter to me were also printed by *Utusan Malaysia*, 11 April 1979, in an article entitled 'Efforts to Develop KMM', from materials Ibrahim Yaakub sent to a Malaysian student.
6. On pages 9 and 10 of his letter to me, Ibrahim Yaakub stated: "And then, in Singapore, I met a Domei News Agency agent who, in August 1941, gave me funds to buy over the *Warta Malaya* newspaper."
7. *Translator's Note*: Haji Ahmad bin Mohd Amin, who is related to Pak Chik Ahmad, has signed a statement testifying that even before the Japanese Invasion of Malaya, Ibrahim had asked Pak Chik Ahmad to hide several gold bars that Ibrahim had received from the Japanese. Pak Chik Ahmad, who was afraid that the bars might be stolen from his wooden house in Taiping, buried them in a flowerpot. These bars were returned to Ibrahim at the end of 1942. See Haji Ahmad's signed statement in Appendix 1 (p. 403).
8. KAME was the Japanese codename for KMM (Kesatuan Melayu Muda). *Kame* is Japanese for 'tortoise', an animal that does not know retreat. Fujiwara Kikan was a Japanese Military Intelligence Unit active in the invasion of Malaya. It was led by Major Fujiwara Iwaichi. KAME's secret insignia was a hexagon with the alphabet 'F' inside. All members and businesses under Fujiwara Kikan used the symbol 'F'.

9. "When he visited the Japanese-owned iron mines at Dungun, Terengganu, some people there suggested to him that he should meet Ishikawa, a Japanese mining engineer, whose office was in High Street, Singapore.... At about the same time, Ibrahim also approached the Japanese mining engineer Ishikawa to indicate his willingness to become a Japanese agent, and met with Michio Hirikawa, who was 'the centre of a certain Japanese intelligence organ' in Malaya. In their discussions, Ibrahim suggested that his best cover would be to have a newspaper of his own." Excerpt from pages 92 and 94 of *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-1945: Ibrahim Yaacob and the Struggle for Indonesia Raya* by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng.
10. "Further negotiations involved the Japanese Consul-General in Singapore, Ken Tsurumi, who in April 1941, after obtaining Tokyo's approval, handed a sum of M\$18,000 to Ibrahim to purchase the *Warta Malaya* Malay newspaper in Singapore owned by an Arab, Syed Hussein bin Ali Alsagoff. With additional money from Tsurumi, Ibrahim bought himself a car." Excerpt from page 94 of *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-1945: Ibrahim Yaacob and the Struggle for Indonesia Raya* by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng.
11. When Ibrahim Yaakub accused me of using Japanese funds, I asked, "Who opened a shop in Singapore and who became a farmer?" It is now clear who had accumulated wealth from the situation! It is true that I received some Japanese funds in Ipoh for KMM members to use in our move south, but Onan took the money from me. From Kuala Lumpur on, Onan received all the funds. For the sake of party unity, I did not retaliate. But unfortunately, Ibrahim believed Onan, his brother-in-law.
12. I have signed statements by KMM members, Ahmad Boestamam, Mohd Mustafa bin Ali and Johar bin Kerong (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 23, pp. 634-6, Appendix 7, pp. 590-6 and Appendix 24, pp. 637-46).
13. I was then selling cut fruits at the Temoh Railway Station. I remember the late Abdul Rahman Rahim, also a KMM member, shedding tears when he saw me vending fruits. He asked, "Brother, why don't you tell Ibrahim of your situation? They are living well in Singapore." I could not reply as I despise opportunists.
14. I first met Hamzah A. Cunard when we moved south with Fujiwara Kikan and into Singapore. There it was Hamzah who summoned me to a warfront where two Malay Regiment platoons were about to be decimated by the Japanese. After the British returned to Malaya in 1945, we met again, this time in an Ipoh lock-up. We have been friends since.

On 9 January 1977, he accompanied me to meet Lt Gen. Fujiwara Iwaichi, former Fujiwara Kikan leader, at the Rasa Sayang Hotel in Penang, where Fujiwara told us that the Japanese gave Ibrahim several gold bullion.

15. In a letter to me, Ibrahim Yaakub claimed that he was an agent to the CID Chief, Mr L.M. Wynne: "In the meantime, British Intelligence Chief Mr L.M. Wynne contacted me and asked me to carry out counter intelligence on his side." Page 96 of *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-1945: Ibrahim Yaacob and the Struggle for Indonesia Raya* reads: "Even as he (Ibrahim Yaakub) was working for KAME, Ibrahim claims, he was already reporting to Wynne (CID Chief) once a week." For detailed information on Ibrahim as a double agent, see pages 91-8 of the same article.
16. *Translator's Note*: In the 29th article in his series, 'Reflections of Pak Sako' (*Utusan Malaysia*, 18 July 1976), Pak Sako wrote:

When it was the Japanese turn to lose the war and surrender, Onan, Ibrahim Yaakub and his wife were whisked to Indonesia (by the Japanese)... and for those of you who have read the three letters of appreciation for Enchik Mustapha Hussain published in article 28 last week, you will understand why Onan Haji Siraj is now

domiciled in Colorado, United States, and Ibrahim Yaakub, or Drs Iskandar Kamel, in Indonesia.

Mustapha Hussain is still alive, but is not well... I feel someone like Enchik Mustapha Hussain, who has contributed a great deal to the people and the nation, should be bestowed with some token of appreciation by the authorities who know 'how to distinguish a diamond from glass'.

17. A *Riwayat Kinta* excerpt:

In the confusion and turmoil of war, it was said that the Japanese senior officers had commandeered Ipoh's St Michael's Institution. Many people went to receive them and seemed glad to welcome the fellow Asians. The Orang Besar Jajahan Kinta (Kinta District Chieftain) Che Wan and his friends, some with J.P. titles, also went.

Dato' Panglima Kinta introduced himself as the Orang Besar Jajahan Kinta to the Military Officer through a Japanese translator. The translator asked if there was anyone among them holding important positions in associations or clubs. Advisors to the Dato' gestured their answer. So, the Dato' said, Ipoh Malays had no associations. I intervened, "How can you say the Malays in Ipoh have no association. You yourself are President of the Kinta Malay Club." He was stunned.

The translator asked again, "The Chief (Japanese Officer) wants to know who is a club member?"

I moved forward and said, "I am Secretary of the Perak Malay Youth Association."

While I was saying that, a young Malay in khaki shorts, short-sleeved shirt, and tousled hair came forward. He showed a small notebook he was carrying. The translator ordered everyone to return home and to come again another day.

The Malay youth was brought upstairs. "Oh, Onan," I said when I recalled that he was the son of Haji Siraj. His father, an engine driver at Isis Cinema, was a friend. It was like a dream. We members of the Perak Malay Youth Association committee were safe with God's grace and were able to get together. The others, Enchik Zakaria Modal, Haji Mohamad Azhari together with us, were busy telling one another our personal experiences. The one not there was our Treasurer, Enchik Nahar bin Manan, brother-in-law to Onan. Nahar had been arrested by the British.

The British troops had fled. The Japanese military had arrived. Some said the British fled for only a short while, perhaps three years. They would return. All kinds of speculations were heard.

Japanese Invasion: Ibrahim Yaakub's Secret Deal

About six weeks before World War II broke out in Malaya on 8 December 1941, I was transported on a stretcher to the Kuala Lumpur Malay Hospital for a serious nervous disorder. Dr Abbas bin Haji Alias¹ was my physician, while Mrs Shearn, wife of a well-known Kuala Lumpur lawyer, treated my legs with fairly modern electrical equipment. Vitamin B Complex injections, initially administered daily, were discontinued when doctors were advised to dispense medication sparingly in case war broke out. My medical problem, the doctors diagnosed, was due to stress, tension and overwork. On 5 December, I was discharged with six months medical leave. Having seen me deep in thought after reading Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History*, Dr Thiruped, an Indian doctor, with a flawless bedside manner, advised me to convalesce in India. "There (India) is where your cure is!"

Daily conversations revolved around the imminent prospects of war. Would Japan dare to attack Malaya, and what if it did? Could Britain defend Malaya successfully? According to news reports, Britain was already in a quagmire. Since 1938, the Germans had overrun several European nations; their submarines had encircled England's shoreline and sunk several warships. Yet, some quarters in Malaya had undying faith in British defence capability. "Don't worry! You know how clever the British are! What do the Japanese have?" A white man sneered, "Japanese pilots are not skilful at dropping bombs. They have slit eyes – how can they aim at targets accurately!" Afraid of being accused as pro-Japanese, I thought better than to reply, "That's utter nonsense!" A white man once labelled me 'pro-Nazi' for borrowing German books from another white man who had agreed to teach me German if I taught him Malay.

I returned to the School of Agriculture in Serdang on the day of my discharge from the hospital. I obtained permission to go on a long sick leave from Mr Mann, through a note attached to my long medical leave certificate. I did not have the opportunity to see him personally. Under such seemingly ordinary circumstances, I began my sick leave, which

turned out to be long and eventful as destiny took a wild and unexpected turn. Upon entering my house, located within the School compound, I was confronted by the ghostly stare of a giant owl sitting on my long-stemmed ceiling fan. Even when the fan was spun at full speed, the awful bird managed to keep its perch. My wife told me that it had been in that position for days. A tingle of apprehension that something ominous was going to happen ran down my spine. What did it mean? After we left, war broke out three days later, and my house was plundered clean. And as fate had it, I did not return to the house. I had stayed in the jinxed house only three days before I was carried to a hospital on a stretcher, and then, as it turned out later, all I had was one more day. The house still stands in the delightful campus of the Malaysian University of Agriculture (UPM) in Serdang.

Before the crack of dawn on 6 December 1941, together with my wife Mariah (recently out of confinement) and three young children (ranging from nine weeks to six years), I left in my Hillman Sports² car for Temoh Station near Tapah, Perak, where my wife's parents lived. My plan to convalesce in India was disrupted when Japan dropped its first bomb in Singapore before dawn on 8 December 1941. Japanese troops and tanks effected surprise landings so ably in Kota Bharu, Kelantan, that British forces did not know what hit them and quickly withdrew from their defence positions in Kelantan and Padang Besar.

I was at my in-laws' house when news of the invasion came over the radio. The first sign of war I spotted was a British Buffalo fighter flying incredibly low, just above the tree-tops, to avoid being detected and hunted down by Japanese Zero fighters, apparently then the world's best. Despite my in-laws' insistence that we stay put, I had to leave. My mother's 'call' from hundreds of miles north was ringing in my ears. It meant everything. I had to be with her at a time like this. We left Temoh Station on 10 December. As we travelled north, we came across British trucks and bren-gun carriers calmly moving south as if they were taking an evening stroll. Upon reaching Chemor, we heard a thunderous explosion just behind us – the Ipoh Railway Station compound had been hit by Japanese bombs.

With God's grace, we arrived safely in my hometown of Matang, right into my mother's waiting arms. The next day, several truckloads of Australian soldiers stopped to rest under the shady *angšana* trees in front of my family home. They also used our bathroom to wash. I was fully aware their presence could draw Japanese air fire to Matang in general, and my house in particular. I chatted with these carefree soldiers, wondering what lay ahead for them! I fed them *rambutan* (a fruit with a hairy outer skin and delicious pearly white flesh) and mangosteens from

our trees. What was curious was that this particular *rambutan* tree, barren for as long as I could remember, had blossomed so heavily this time that we could hardly see its leaves. In fact, all fruit trees were bearing fruit at a rate that was out of the ordinary. Such events were ominous to Malays. This was especially worrying when newspapers reported incidents in Kedah where colonies of frogs were fighting. I was pleased, for our sake and theirs, when the soldiers left at dawn the next day. Several days later, we felt the first Japanese bomb to hit Taiping six miles away when our wall clock came crashing down. We also saw dark grey columns of smoke billowing in the distant sky.

At about the same time, frightened relatives who fled from their homes in Keroh, the tiny Malaya-Thai border town, arrived with the skimpy belongings they could load into a car. They advised us to evacuate our home immediately, to go to any place inaccessible to Japanese vehicles. These petrified relatives were convinced that Japanese planes could furl up their wings and fly in between trees! To avoid undesirable incidents, with haste, we moved across the Larut River and hid all our *sampans*.

After the fall of Taiping, waves of Japanese soldiers flowed into Matang. From across the river, I peered out for a glimpse of these Japanese soldiers. They wore long pants and tunics, boots or black canvas shoes, puttees and *boshis* (Japanese caps which had a small piece of cloth hanging at the back). Most were armed, some with long samurai swords trailing from their sides. Later, when I had plenty of opportunities to observe the Japanese from up close, I noticed some wore strange web-toed rubber boots, where the toes were divided into two parts, one part just for the big toe, the other for the remaining four toes. They came to Matang in search of food, especially chicken, ducks and eggs. When things got better, I returned to my father's house periodically to check on it while my wife and children remained in hiding across the river.

Chinese folk, who stocked rice and flour in their homes, hurriedly bundled them up in waterproof containers before lowering them into the water. Some, in complete fear and panic, just threw whatever they had into the water. Girls and young women slipped into the water under their homes through openings made in the floorboards. Once the Japanese troops had left, they once again climbed back into their homes. That was the scene in Matang, which happened to be under floodwaters. I saw these spectacles from my hiding place across the river. I noticed some Chinese folks were very quick to practise diplomacy. Perhaps the news from China had alerted them. Despite being slapped about initially, they feted the Japanese with food, such as fried rice and noodles, after which smiles replaced grim expressions.

Japanese soldiers, who arrived in trucks or on bicycles (the bicycle brigades), were seen bashing a few Chinese who refused to part with their possessions. Bicycles were simply snatched away or exchanged with Japanese ones. Japanese soldiers loved bicycles made in England – especially the speedy Raleigh – to chase after enemies called *Inggerisu* (Englishmen). No one desired Japanese-made bicycles, even when given free. Only one bicycle in Matang escaped confiscation, despite being brand new. It belonged to an Indian Public Works Department supervisor. Many a Japanese soldier had grabbed the new bicycle with a big grin, but when they measured the distance between the seat and the pedal, they returned the bicycle with a snigger and an *Arigato* (thank you). At 28 inches, it was too high for the Japanese soldiers, who were, by and large, very short.

Two KMM Members and a Party of Japanese Come for Me³

One mid-afternoon towards the end of December, while sitting on the veranda of my father's house, I pondered over my fate and that of the hapless Malays caught in the war. I was sure these peace-loving folks had no inkling of what war actually meant. Several cars suddenly stopped in front of the house, and several men alighted. I felt uneasy and apprehensive until I saw the familiar faces of two KMM members, Pak Chik Ahmad⁴ from Taiping and Onan Haji Siraj⁵ from Ipoh. Several Japanese, armed to the teeth, were immediately behind them. I invited the entire party up on the veranda.

Onan introduced me to a Japanese captain, "This is Mustapha, KMM's Vice President. He is very important to us now!" Next, Onan recounted how KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub had been arrested by the British Police in Singapore. Onan had been nabbed alongside Ibrahim, but was freed after Ibrahim lied to the British that Onan was just his brother-in-law and not connected to KMM. Onan also told me that in the one night they spent together in custody, Ibrahim had disclosed KMM's secret Japanese codename KAME, which in Japanese means 'tortoise', an animal that does not know retreat. KAME's secret symbol was a hexagon with the alphabet 'F' inside it.⁶ Onan then travelled from Singapore to North Malaya to seek Japanese officers using the 'F' symbol, including the Japanese who were with him. Although I was KMM's Vice President, I was completely unaware of Ibrahim's secret pact with the Japanese Consul-General in Singapore, whereby KMM members could be used by the Japanese in their war effort. Ishak Haji Muhammad was also left in the dark.

After Onan's briefing, I was 'invited' to attend a 'crucial meeting' in Taiping, after which I would be sent back to Matang. How could I say no? I remember a Malay adage: *jika tiada senapang, lebih baik beri jalan lapang* (if one has no gun, it is best to give way). I tried to explain that my legs were weak from a nervous disorder but a Japanese Officer snapped, "Never mind! Four Japanese soldiers can carry you on a chair!" I was brought to the Raja Rest House near the Taiping Lake Gardens, already commandeered and converted into a Japanese military installation. There I was introduced to Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, Chief of Fujiwara Kikan, or F Kikan,⁷ a Japanese Military Intelligence Unit named after him. Exceptionally tall for a Japanese – almost six feet – Fujiwara was soft-spoken and gentle in demeanour. Although only a major, he seemed immensely powerful.

F Kikan consisted of Major Fujiwara, about twenty Japanese officers, fifteen interpreters and other assistants comprising Japanese citizens domiciled in Malaya for some time before the invasion. Many of the interpreters and assistants were volunteers. Major Fujiwara was assisted by Captain Tsuchimochi Norimasu, Lieutenant (Lt) Nakamiya Goro, Lt Yonemura and Lt Yamaguchi. Interpreters included Chief Interpreter Otaguro, a former English school teacher in Singapore; Ishi-san, from an influential Japanese family; Yamashita, a worker at Taiaan and Co. along Batu Road, Kuala Lumpur; Suzuki, a photographer from Kuala Kangsar; Ohta, a barber from Alor Star, Kedah, and a 'boy' Hashimoto. Cumulatively, the group could speak English, Mandarin, Malay and other languages. Ishi-san was one Japanese who knew Urdu. After 35 years, these are some names I can remember. At the Raja Rest House, someone whispered to me an earlier incident when two KMM members were taken to Taiping Prison. There, KMM member Pak Chik Ahmad was ordered to strike British prisoners with a stick as a test of his anti-British sentiments. When Pak Chik Ahmad could only manage a slight swipe on a man's posterior, a furious Japanese grabbed the stick and hit Pak Chik Ahmad with it.

In our conversation with Major Fujiwara at the Raja Rest House, we enquired about the fate of Malays now in jeopardy. What about the safety of their lives, their women and their property? It was then that I discovered that Ibrahim had sold KMM to the Japanese for a huge sum of money.⁸ Ibrahim had not only pledged his own personal assistance to the Japanese, but also that of the entire KMM when Japan entered Malaya. Under these circumstances, I was 'coaxed' to go with the Japanese to Ipoh. They promised that I could be carried on a chair if necessary. Pak Chik Ahmad appealed, "I must ask my wife first." After an interpreter translated Pak

Chik Ahmad's plea, the Japanese officers in the room grew red in the face. One of them snarled, "What! Just to go to Ipoh, you must tell your wife first?"

Taken to Ipoh

It turned out that Major Fujiwara was waiting for some others in Taiping, including a group of Achehnese who had promised to form a Japanese Fifth Column. When they did not arrive on time, we left in trucks and cars. The KMM group consisted of Onan, Pak Chik Ahmad, Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman,⁹ Othman Hamzah, Ahmad Shafiq and several others. Othman Hamzah and Ahmad Shafiq were 'presented' to me by Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir (founder of the religious institution Maahad Il-Ehya As-Syariff in Gunung Semanggul) as 'offerings' to the 'Asia for the Asians' war.

Everything happened so swiftly and under such great pressure that my wife and family were unaware of my departure. Travelling south towards Kuala Kangsar, there was not a soul or even a crippled animal to be seen. Everyone and everything had bolted into the countryside, away from the aggressive Japanese reach. The items most popular with Japanese soldiers were bicycles, torch-lights, watches, fountain pens, chicken and eggs. Should one resist, a tight smack would land on one's face.

Kuala Kangsar

The Japanese considered the Perak River the main obstacle in their advance south. This river, spanned by a road and a railway bridge, was Malaya's widest. When we arrived at the road-bridge in Enggor, it had already been destroyed by British troops, either by digging holes or by using small explosives. Japanese sappers were seen scurrying up and down, busily repairing it with speed and efficiency. The railway bridge was also severely damaged, with the broken railway track in the middle of the river pointing towards heaven. I noticed Japanese sappers repairing it with rubber trees found in abundance on the riverbank. After the railway track was slightly repaired, I saw Japanese soldiers taking off the rubber tyres of their trucks. I wondered what they were up to. The next thing I knew, the tyre-less trucks were on the railway track. Lo and behold, the trucks were moving on the one-metre-gauge rail line, hauling supplies. After that the tyres were re-attached.

As both bridges were out of commission, we turned towards Manong with the hope of using the Tanjung Blanja pontoon bridge. At this point,

we left Suzuki and Onan for a very important mission: to look for the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Abdul Aziz, who had left his palace to seek refuge in a village, and to return him to his palace in Kuala Kangsar. We did this for two reasons. One, as soon as the British crossed the Bernam River, which marked the southern boundary of Perak, the security and welfare of the people in Perak would become the Sultan's responsibility. A temporary mandate of power would be given to him by Major Fujiwara. Two, if the Sultan was not in his palace, certain parties might exploit the confusion and seize his throne.

Suzuki, a photographer who had lived in Kuala Kangsar for many years before the Invasion, was friendly with the late Sultan Iskandar Shah. Possessing a licensed gun, Suzuki was free to hunt all over the state of Perak. I am sure every yard of the road to Grik in the north, mapped and unmapped, had already been 'explored' by him. It was quite unfair of the British to blame the Malays entirely for their defeat. On our way, we crossed a river somewhere near the town of Bruas using a Japanese-invented bridge. This bridge consisted of just two pairs of rubber tree trunks tied together with wires. Under the guidance of a Japanese soldier giving signals with two index fingers from the opposite bank of the river, our trucks crossed, one after another, without mishap. I must add that the Japanese fighting men I saw were incredibly courageous human beings, willing to die for 'country and Emperor'. For example, when a soldier repairing a bridge was shot down, another took his place without hesitation, and carried on as if nothing had happened.

F Kikan Japanese Officers described Lt Gen. T. Yamashita, the 25th Army Commander who had led the brilliant Malayan Campaign, as a transportation wizard. That was why supplies were always on hand all the way down from Indo-China to Singapore. They even brought collapsible contraptions (small motor launches which could be folded up and carried by a few men) for crossing rivers. Bridge and road repair materials were carried in lorries not far behind. If they were short of good timber, readily available rubber trees were the substitute. We found the Tanjung Blanja pontoon bridge in utter ruins. The British had either sunk the floats or drifted them down-river. We were therefore forced to backtrack along an old bridle path (six-foot path) by the Perak River. Again, not a single human being or domestic animal was in sight. We then came across a group of six houses poised on very high pillars; perhaps the area was flood prone. Japanese troops were already in complete control.

What I saw infuriated me. Some soldiers were ripping off planks from walls to put under their vehicle tyres; some used house pillars as rafts to chase after enemies who had escaped down-river; some were cooking rice

using chairs and tables as firewood, and one was seen furiously smashing gramophone records of foreign songs offensive to his ears! I was livid! I protested through an interpreter, asking him to report the shameful destruction of property belonging to innocent people to his superior. "Next time, look for white-painted bungalows because British property is usually white," I told the interpreter. Near Parit town, using a kind of Japanese ferry they had brought, we crossed the river where it was considerably narrower. Japanese soldiers then bathed and frolicked in the nude in the crystal clear water. We would have done the same. Had anyone heard of soldiers going to war with sarongs for bathing purposes? In Parit, I noticed two brick shop-houses, the only Malay property in the town, razed to the ground by a bomb. Why were Malays the unluckiest people?

Advancing south towards Ipoh, we passed the town of Pusing, later made famous by Sir Gerald Templer, who called it "The little town of Pusing..." because Pusing dwellers were not co-operating with the British to stem communism. I saw *durian* trees and coconut palms truncated at the top as if a giant hand had amputated them. We arrived in Ipoh late at night. When questioned by a Japanese sentry, a Japanese officer in my vehicle replied, "Fujiwara Kikan Sako in KAME." (Fujiwara = name of the Major; Kikan = Unit; Sako in = Intelligence; KAME = Tortoise). The guard responded, "*Asoka!*" Maybe, he meant "Oh, is that so?" Next, I heard the word "*Anone*" preceding every question. This was my introduction to Japanese.

In Ipoh, we stopped at the Anderson School along Jalan Anderson, where we groped in the dark to take over one wing of the school as a place to rest for the night. It became the F Kikan HQ during the period we were in Ipoh. Pak Chik Ahmad, who had left Taiping in another vehicle, was missing. After some investigation, I discovered he had been 'pushed out' of a moving vehicle. He had expressed reluctance while in Taiping, but he was only pushed out by the Japanese at Lawan Kuda, two miles out of Taiping. That was his second horrifying experience in one day. Just like a Malay proverb, "when elephants meet in conflict, a mouse-deer trapped between them is sure to perish."

Ipoh¹⁰

What was expected of the KMM became more apparent in Ipoh. KMM had been 'Japanised' as KAME, the code name frequently broadcasted by the Japanese propaganda radio prior to the invasion. Consequently, as soon as KAME was decoded as KMM, the British Police embarked on a mop-up operation of KMM members nationwide. In Ipoh, KMM members

Mohd Nor bin Abdul Shukur, Osman bin Azmi, Chikgu Junid Mahmud (Tengah Road), Aminuddin bin Jumain and Mohamad Dali were arrested on 5 December 1941.

When Major Fujiwara ordered us to gather KMM members to be assigned special tasks, it became crystal clear that a body founded by young Malay nationalists as an anti-British political weapon was now being made use of by a new colonial nation bursting with ambitious expansionist policies. Not a single KMM member, including myself (though I was Vice President), knew anything about Ibrahim's collusion with the Japanese Government. KMM members found themselves ensnared in a trap devised by Ibrahim,¹¹ making KMM a fifth column of this new Eastern coloniser which had already captured Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria and part of China. This Eastern power now directed its attention to Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia and other Asian nations with the clever clarion call, 'Asia for the Asians'. Was Ibrahim, who colluded with the Japanese, an idealist, opportunist, or mercenary? Only time would tell.

I faced a horrendous dilemma. What should I do as KMM Vice President? Should I co-operate to fulfil all assignments? That was, if I could. If not, what would happen? Had political negotiations with the Japanese been sealed by Ibrahim? If so, was it dependent on how closely KMM co-operated. These were some of the questions swimming in my head, and I had no one to consult. Sometimes, I met members of the IIL (Indian Independence League), led by Pritam Singh, who had come into Malaya from Thailand.

Only some parts of Ipoh were damaged by the bombs. Banks and shops were broken into and looted. I saw a dead man under a sack of rice he had tried to loot. The almost hundred per cent Chinese population of Ipoh vanished into thin air. There was, however, a Chinese man, claiming to be a Manchu, who feted the Japanese soldiers billeted in his house. He was rewarded with a high position in the Japanese Police Force during the Occupation, but after the Japanese surrender, the British sentenced him to many years of imprisonment for collaborating with the Japanese and for hurting civilians. I was ashamed to wear my 'F' armband. If anyone asked me what 'F' stood for, I replied 'Food'. If I remember correctly, three Fifth Column groups were sent to the warfront, which had reached Kampar by then.

Protecting Women

Everyday, I received reports of young women taken away to satisfy lusts. If this was the conduct of Japanese soldiers, how could KMM gain the co-operation of the Malay population? Who would contribute if their

wives and daughters were possible victims? The same concerns applied to me. I had left my wife in hiding. Was my family safe, or had they become victims? I remember seeing young women in Matang jumping into the river when they heard word of the Japanese approach. And just the day before, I had seen Japanese soldiers waylay several Eurasian girls in Malay outfits walking behind a bullock cart.

I complained to F Kikan officers about the ugly scenes, but nothing happened. Then, out of the blue, a high-ranking Japanese Air Force officer, Lt Gen. Itagaki,¹² appeared in Ipoh. I was introduced to him. After Major Fujiwara briefed him on the KMM, he thanked all of us through an interpreter. Next, in strong Japanese-accented English, he commended me with three phrases: "Secrecy, determination and fighting spirit."

After requesting KMM's closer co-operation for victory in the 'Asia for the Asians' war, he enquired about the Malays in general and about us in particular. He concluded with a question, "Is there anything I can do to help?" Having been commended, I seized the opportunity to bring the ugly matter to the attention of the highest authority. As KMM leader, I answered that we lacked nothing and were willing to provide food to Japanese soldiers at no profit, but there was, however, one thing we could not give. My voice quivered, not out of fear, but out of anger, when I recalled two Malay victims just that morning.

Chief Interpreter Otaguro, sitting on my left, kicked me under the table, while Onan, on my right, stamped my foot, signalling me to shut up. But I continued, "How are we to co-operate if our wives and daughters are not safe from Japanese soldiers?" English-speaking Japanese officers in the room fell silent. We could have heard a pin drop. Otaguro refused to translate my message, but I insisted. When Itagaki caught the meaning, his facial muscles twitched and his eyes narrowed. He roared, "Are you speaking the truth?" I answered, "If you don't believe me, I can take you and you can see for yourself!" I added that as KMM leader, that complaint was made in the name of all Malays.

After a long hard gaze into my eyes, he began to believe me and called out, "Don't go yet." He took a small notebook from his top pocket, wrote something on it, and stamped the document with a square official seal carried by every Japanese of official standing. To this document, he added an oval personal seal giving the directive the highest priority. From that date, I noticed all Ipoh roads, except for Hugh Low Street and Brewster Road, were impassable to Japanese soldiers. I myself had difficulty moving in and out of the town because of the order.

Following that complaint to Itagaki, I was closely watched by two F Kikan officers. I began to feel I was in real danger. I had almost lost my

head for being so ‘insolent and impertinent’ as to criticise the conduct of Japan’s Imperial Army. I dare claim this to have been my major service to the people of Ipoh and the area. Reports of brutal rapes became fewer in number. I felt the effect of Itagaki’s letter in Kuala Lumpur later on where I heard of not too many such incidents except in truly remote areas. From my personal observation, not too many such crimes were committed in southern Malaya.

I learnt that the Japanese also despised such crimes. I had seen a Japanese soldier dragged to the back of the F Kikan HQ to be severely punished by his superior for it. Once, I saw a Japanese soldier brutally thrashed by his superior with the scabbard of a samurai sword for stealing twenty cents from an old pig farmer. The money had fallen from under his *boshi* when he bowed. I saw that discipline among the Japanese was quite commendable in the Malayan Campaign, compared to what we heard and read about elsewhere.

Later on, in Singapore, the Japanese converted two rows of houses into ‘Comfort Houses’ or ‘Cherry Blossom Houses’ for Japanese troops. The occupants were professional women from cabarets and other such places. Just after the fall of Singapore in February 1942, I encountered a Malay woman who had smeared her face with soot, and was hiding in a friend’s house in Beduk. She was cowering in fear from soldiers of the ‘Land of the Rising Sun’. But in 1943, when I was in Singapore for the formation of the Japanese Volunteer Army, Malai Giyu Gun, I happened to meet the same Malay woman. Before I could say anything, she proudly announced, “I am sorry, I already have a Japanese Master.” The Japanese whom she had once feared more than ghosts were now the source of her lucrative income.

Fujiwara Kikan’s Fifth Column Members

It is now time for you, dear reader, to know more about the role of members of KMM and the Perak Malay Youth Association (PPMP), and other Malay youths not in any organisation who were involved in Japan’s war against Britain in Malaya. Historically, the Fifth Column was initiated by General Franco in the Spanish Civil War. The Fifth Column is said to be an important factor in a war, especially when, after troops had enclosed an area on all sides, Fifth Columnists could open the way.

In Ipoh, I had learnt about Ibrahim’s secret pact with Japan for which he received \$50,000.¹³ The collusion would make KMM the Japanese Military’s fifth column. I asked Major Fujiwara whether Ibrahim had made a political arrangement with the Japanese before agreeing to be its fifth

column. His answer was a definite “No!” I was shocked. How stupid of Ibrahim! The lives of Malay youths would be on the line! And for what? He should have bargained for Malaya’s Independence! I then recalled what I had read about Japanese conduct in Korea and Manchukuo.

In the Malayan invasion, Japan employed a three-pronged manoeuvre, one line of attack down the East Coast, another down the West, and the third down the middle. Six Malays came with the Japanese from Kedah in the North. They included Wan Daud Ahmad (later Datuk), who was flown by the Japanese to Alor Star, where he met the Sultan of Kedah in his palace. Wan Daud was later brought by the Japanese to Ipoh to join my group moving south. I managed to save him from a deadly situation for which he was forever indebted.

Another fifth column member was Abdul Kadir Adabi,¹⁴ who travelled from Kota Bharu to Kuala Lumpur and later returned to Kota Bharu for a special assignment. In recognition of his willingness to make two dangerous trips in the pandemonium of war, we nicknamed him A.K. Dukal (Abdul Kadir Dua Kali or A.K. Twice). He called me Mustapha Bayu, Bayu being the acronym for Bapa Melayu, or Father of the Malays. I am proud Adabi’s name now graces a thriving private educational institution. I hope to meet his descendants. Another fifth column member from Kelantan was Ahmad Shukri. Judge for yourself if these Malay fifth columnists actually collaborated with one of the two ‘elephants’ in conflict, or were they mainly working to save the many ‘mouse-deer’ in the middle who would otherwise have been killed. I also hope you can decide if I was a collaborator.

Assembling Malay Youth for the Warfront

I was ordered by Major Fujiwara, through Chief Interpreter Otaguro, to assemble as many KMM members in Ipoh as possible. I relayed the order to Onan, who knew Ipoh town like the back of his hand, but almost all KMM members in the vicinity were already in British prisons. Now what was I to do? I could not possibly report to the Japanese that almost all KMM members had been arrested. Ibrahim, I believe, had boasted to the Japanese that KMM was an organisation with dedicated and courageous members from all corners of the country. That was why the Japanese were shocked when Pak Chik Ahmad had to get his wife’s permission to go to Ipoh. I could not possibly shrug my shoulders and say to the Japanese, “What can we do, all our members have been nabbed by the white man.”

In that critical moment, with the help of God, the All-Knowing, an old Malay man I knew well came into the picture. That was, however,

the first time I saw this entertaining personality with the gift of the gab without a necktie. Ipoh folk had nicknamed him 'Pak Itam Sulaiman Power Dunia' or 'World Power Pak Itam Sulaiman'. A well-known mining broker, he had, in his possession, a treaty over the Riau-Lingga Islands signed by the British with a Singapore Malay ruler. He could recite every clause in it.

I related my predicament to Pak Itam. Where would I find members for a Japanese Fifth Column? Pak Itam listened attentively, his eyebrows almost knitted together, as if he understood my quandary. His very brief response, "Mustapha, my son, you stay here. Let me look for Talib," did not help ease my anxiety. To expedite his movements in Ipoh, now heavily guarded by Japanese sentries, I gave him an 'F' armband, a white armband with the letter 'F' in red. After pinning the armband to his left sleeve, I noticed a dramatic change in this man; he left with such speed as if his legs had been fitted with new springs.

Pak Itam returned with a frail-looking man in his thirties. Although reticent and serious, I detected from our short introductory conversation an ambitious, yet noble aspiration in this man. This 'Talib', whom Pak Itam presented to me, was A. Talib bin Haji Ahmad, leader of the Perak Malay Youth Association (PPMP). I knew PPMP members did not support the feudalistic Perak Malay Association. After explaining that his organisation was sympathetic to KMM's cause, he said with all sincerity, "Please accept PPMP members as your own brothers." When I told him what the Japanese expected of me, he offered his PPMP members to undertake whatever tasks were necessary so long as they were "in the interests of our motherland." He later brought several PPMP members and other Malay youths. According to Mohd Mustafa bin Ali, one of the youths gathered in Ipoh, others included Saad bin Abdul Ghani, Hashim Yatim, Nur Yusuf Maxwell (of Malay-English parentage) and Mohd Yusof from Batu Gajah.

These youths were introduced to F Kikan officers, after which they received three days of military training from Lt Yonemura (an F Kikan Officer assigned to take charge of Malay fifth column members) at the Anderson School badminton hall. Among the young men, I noticed a smiling and carefree boy, Mohd Mustafa bin Ali. During a lecture, a Japanese captain sitting next to me asked, "Are KMM members all very brave?" I pretended to take offence at the question and pointed to Mohd Mustafa, "Just look at that one, does he look like a coward?" The captain rose to his feet and briskly walked towards Mohd Mustafa. He clapped the boy's shoulder, and without warning, slipped his left hand into the boy's pants. In an instant, he pulled his hands out and shouted

“*Yoroshi*” (good)! The Captain then whispered, “This is a simple and practical test to gauge a man’s courage.” Maybe what he meant was that if the private parts had shrunk, the person was a coward. He must have found a handful in the case of Mohd Mustafa.

As for the flamboyant Pak Itam, after introducing me to Talib, who helped to assemble Malay youth, I took him to see Major Fujiwara in case he had something to say. After a short exchange of salutations, Fujiwara gave Pak Itam an ‘F’ notice to paste on his house door. But Pak Itam asked for another one, quietly explaining, “I have two wives.” When an interpreter translated his words, Japanese officers in the room blurted “Asoka!”, held their breath for one brief moment, before bursting into loud guffaws. “What, an old man like you is still so strong?” one of them quipped.

A few days later, Japanese sentry guards in Ipoh were amused to see Pak Itam riding a bicycle wearing a polo hat, a long-sleeved shirt with an ‘F’ armband, a necktie, long boots and breeches. F Kikan officers also looked in disbelief. He was dressed up to meet officers at the Japanese HQ with certain objectives in mind. But he left the HQ looking terribly distraught. In his Perak accent, he said sarcastically, “They think they are the only ones who own long boots!” He then added, “I asked them about the tin mines left by the British. They ridiculed me. You know what their answer was? They said, ‘Do you think Japanese come thousands of miles to give British mines to Malays?’ Can you imagine that?” Pak Itam concluded his story in a subdued, but bewildered tone, “Mustapha, my son, we have awakened a sleeping tiger!”

Military Training for Malay Youth

Under Lt Yonemura, Malay fifth column youth were given brief military training and instructions on the use of small arms. Some were given clothes, Belgian-made automatic pistols and funds for their move south. Secret weapons included a small coal-like stone to blow up locomotive boilers and a small stone for exploding trucks or pillboxes. They were also given a small hand bomb in the form of a Libby’s canned fruit tin. Instructions were given for sabotage work behind lines controlled by the British or its allies such as the Indian, Gurkha, Australian and other troops. They were also to paste ‘F’ signs on houses, as well as to advise folks living near main roads to temporarily move away.

At the end of the training, I was called to give a speech to whip up their morale. But on the quiet, I specifically told them to avoid involvement in clashes between Japanese and Malay soldiers or volunteers. Also, that the war we were facing was not our fight; it was a war between two

colonisers. These excited youths were then loaded on trucks to be taken to the warfront; the war had already reached Kampar. They were let off in pairs to move south from Kampar. As they clambered onto the trucks, each one with spirits soaring high, I whispered several messages to them. One, they must try to reach their destination in Kuala Lumpur by all means. Two, if the secret weapons they carried were endangering their lives, they had to make quick decisions. If the danger was large, throw the weapons away. My last advice: "Should you meet problems, save your own lives first!"

Thus, from Ipoh, KMM and other youth moved as saviours of the people, and not as traitors. Although the KMM had fought on the side of Japan, it was under duress. KMM was still anti-colonial, British or Japanese. It was because of this action under duress that KMM has been described by some Malays as pro-Japanese. Unfortunately, it cannot be denied that there were pro-Japanese KMM members. This was true of individuals, and not of the party as a whole.

Mohd Mustafa¹⁵ was just an ordinary Ipoh boy, not a member of any association, who was looking for employment at the outbreak of war when he was recruited into the Japanese fifth column. Nevertheless, he played an important role in Malayan history. He fought to liberate his homeland from British masters, who at that moment were struggling to stay alive after the unexpected Japanese assault. Can we label Mohd Mustafa a collaborator for moving with Japanese troops (specifically the F Kikan) from Ipoh to Singapore? After the fall of Singapore, he returned to his hometown. It is up to you, dear reader, to interpret his role, the role of the Malay fifth columns, and that of KMM. It should be remembered that all of this happened when anti-British sentiments were ablaze in the hearts of Malays. Britain, a Western power, was still gripping Malaya by the throat.

Twenty years after the end of World War II, I came across Mohd Mustafa working for Malayan Railways and as a part-time insurance agent. He was the same gregarious and cheerful person, but apprehensive about his future. He felt as if someone had manipulated him. Our F Kikan days involved fighting for Malaya's Independence. In his nostalgic words, "At that time, Enchik Mustapha, I felt as if Malaya was already in the hands of the Malays." Only those who had experienced the bitter indignity and subjugation suffered as a colonised race can understand the depth of that statement.

Notes

1. He was a Captain in the Mobile Field Ambulance Unit of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF). After the fall of Singapore, I was able to save him

from detention at Farrer Park. Thus, he escaped the possibility of meeting the same fate as six other Malay Volunteers and Malay Regiment officers who were killed en masse. (This story will follow.) Dr Abbas, later PAS president, is currently a happy pensioner after retiring from his post as Director of the University Hospital. Of the many people whose lives I saved, he was the only one who came to thank me years later.

2. It was taken away by Japanese troops from under my father's house in Jalan Menteri, Matang, Perak, after I was 'taken away' by the Japanese to Singapore together with other KMM members.
3. This was the beginning of my involvement in World War II. I cannot remember the exact date. According to Fujiwara, in his book *F Kikan* (p. 100), Onan Haji Siraj had gone to meet him in Taiping on 26 December 1941, and after that, Onan "left for the Taiping-Ipoh area determined to launch KMM recruiting activities."
4. Pak Chik Ahmad, born in Batu Hampar, Perak, later moved to Kampung Boyan in Taiping. In his youth, he had been active in the Friends of the Pen Association of Malaya. Absolutely loyal to KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub, their friendship continued until his death. The last time I met Pak Chik Ahmad was in 1974 in my Matang house, when Ibrahim visited Malaysia. Pak Chik Ahmad came as Ibrahim's representative to coax me to undertake a dangerous mission, which I declined. I had an argument with him over this and later regretted that he died on his way to the Holy Land of Mecca soon after.
5. For several months, Onan Haji Siraj had been a student at the School of Agriculture in Serdang, where I taught him Botany, before his transfer to the Kuala Lumpur Technical School.
6. On page 10 of his letter to me dated 20 May 1975, Ibrahim Yaakub wrote: "In that one night Onan and I were in custody, Onan received instructions from me on how to activate the underground; KAME's code was also given to him on that night."
7. Fujiwara Kikan, or F Kikan, a Japanese military intelligence unit whose objective was "to facilitate the Japanese Campaign in Malaya and promote goodwill and cooperation between the Malayan people and the Japanese Army." Excerpt from "I Fujiwara, Memorandum of the Chief of the Fujiwara Kikan", Tokyo, 1960 (pp. 20, 21). F Kikan was led by Major Fujiwara Iwaichi.

In September 1941, three months before World War II broke out, Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, an Imperial Army Headquarters staff officer, formed the Southern District Intelligence Corps. Fujiwara selected his men from the Nakano School (Army Intelligence Centre) and from among graduates of Tokyo's College of Foreign Studies and Kobe University. After an intensive officers' training course, the men were sent to Bangkok under assumed names and worked as clerks, hotel workers, etc. During the Japanese invasion of Malaya, Major Fujiwara was also assisted by Japanese citizens who had lived in Malaya for some time before the invasion.

8. In his book, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (p. 141), W.R. Roff wrote: "As the Pacific War approached, Ibrahim Yaakub established contact with the Japanese and was assisted with Japanese money to purchase the daily newspaper *Warta Malaya*."
9. Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman was a Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) graduate who had participated in a course at the Serdang School of Agriculture. He moved from Taiping to Singapore as a fifth columnist, was an active member of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) after World War II, and died in Parit Buntar in the early 1980s. His last post was at the Kelang Monitoring Unit of the Malaysian Department of Broadcasting. Once chairman of UMNO Parit Buntar, he had been detained during the Malayan Emergency (1948-60).

10. The following excerpt from *Riwayat Kinta* (The Story of Kinta) by A. Talib bin Haji Ahmad gives a picture of Ipoh after the Japanese invasion:

One day in December 1941 at about 9.00 am, a couple of aircraft were seen flying in the sky. Ipoh residents looked up with pride, expecting the two to be those of the RAF (Royal Air Force). But how disappointed they were when moments later, the planes dropped bombs on the Gunung Rapat aerodrome. Black smoke billowed in the sky. Then, the aircraft strafed Ipoh town with machine-gun fire. What pandemonium! How people ran! Even civilians became targets. The cries of young children and women could be heard everywhere. People were running, not towards shelters, but just anywhere, confused and frightened.

Thousands ran along the banks of the Kinta River, which adorned Ipoh. Luckily, there were British soldiers who shouted, "lie down Joe!" It was only then that the innocent people who knew nothing about war learned how to 'lie low' to avoid becoming sitting ducks.

Soon, they began to evacuate, some went to the mountains, others to the interior. But wherever one ran, enemy aircraft were incessantly above one's head. Some soldiers climbed trees, while others hid in bamboo clumps.

It was pure hysteria – that first experience! Shops were damaged and many people died, their heads separated from their bodies.

Ipoh residents began to flow into villages with bedrolls and whatever they could carry. Village homes were filled to the brim. Tens of families shared houses. Some slept on the ground.

Not long after, Australian troops began to enter and destroy shops and business houses in Ipoh. Many people looted openly. The Punjabis benefited the most, carrying their loot in bullock carts and cars. My friend K. Singgaran and I watched dumbfounded. We could not bring ourselves to join in. There were looters killed fighting each other and some died when heavy loads fell on them.

British soldiers implemented their 'scorched earth' policy by burning properties and exploding bridges behind them. Streets in Ipoh were strewn with glass and debris. The once lively town looked as if it had been hit by the legendary giant bird, Garuda.

In the same month, Japanese troops arrived. Bicycles and watches were snatched away. Then came another group of Japanese who kept shouting "*kurrah*" (come quickly). Those who did not know what the word meant were repeatedly slapped, rendering great fear among the people. Regardless of whether one was an officer, a rich man, a Raja or a Datuk, everyone was forced to work. Many people suffered. And unlucky were women whom they came across – they were raped.

11. Page 41, *F Kikan* by Lt Gen. Fujiwara Iwaichi: "Then in mid-November, I received an intelligence report from the Japanese Consulate General in Singapore about an anti-British movement organised by the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), or the Young Malay Union... I learnt from Consul General Tsurumi, ...that this group had made contact with the Japanese consular mission in Singapore."
12. *Translator's Note*: In a couple of my father's letters written later in his life, he implied that Gen Itagaki (in Ipoh) was Itagaki, Seishiro (1885-1948), the Japanese Military Governor for Malaya (October 1944-August 1945) who signed the surrender papers to the Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia, Lord Louis Mountbatten. Itagaki was convicted for several war crimes and was hanged in 1948.
13. In an interview with Robert Reece, Fujiwara said, "...Ken Tsurumi, who, in April 1941, after obtaining Tokyo's approval, handed over a sum of \$18,000 to Ibrahim

to purchase the *Warta Malaya*, a Malay newspaper in Singapore owned by an Arab, Syed Hussein bin Ali Alsagoff. With additional money from Tsurumi, Ibrahim also bought himself a car.”

14. Abdul Kadir Adabi was a well-known Kelantan writer before World War II broke out. Three of his novels were *Acuman Mahkota*, *Melati Kota Bharu* and *Sebelas Rejab*. His writing was incisive and critical, covering economics, politics, religion, language, education, social and cultural issues. His son, Mansor Adabi, was the husband of Nathrah Hertog.
15. Please read the statement by Mohd Mustafa bin Ali on his role as a fifth columnist (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 7, pp. 590-6).

The Japanese Reject Independence for Malaya

While I was in Ipoh in January 1942, F Kikan officers kept me posted on war developments at various fronts in South-East-Asia. I could hardly believe my ears sometimes; about the speedy Japanese conquests. Yet, at the same time, I recalled the war in Europe where Poland, Belgium, Denmark and Norway, among others, had one by one fallen rather swiftly into German hands. Japan seemed to adopt the same *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) tactic, overrunning and occupying territories in the blink of an eye.

This impressive display of Japanese military success prompted us, KMM members, to request certain considerations. Through Major Fujiwara, we requested the Japanese not to view Malays as adversaries, to guarantee the safety of Malay lives, to protect the chastity of all women, not to damage Malay property, to entrust all Malay detainees to KMM, and finally, not to act against any Malay without KMM investigation. In short, all matters pertaining to Malays were to be brought to KMM's attention.

I was then suddenly ordered to leave Ipoh and to advance down the peninsula with the F Kikan in an assorted convoy of cars, trucks and other war vehicles. Just outside Ipoh, a little beyond Kuala Dipang, we had to slow down to a crawl. Sometimes, we had to stop moving altogether. The convoy, carrying soldiers, arms, repair equipment and food supplies, was far too long. The problem was worsened by the fact that the British had just withdrawn from Kampar town, about 25 miles out of Ipoh and about midway between Penang and Kuala Lumpur.

In retreating south, the British systematically destroyed every bridge and crossing to retard the enemy advances. These bridges,¹ big and small, had to be quickly repaired by the Japanese, but they seemed small inconveniences to the sappers who worked like ants with incredible speed. Japanese troops, I must admit, were light-footed, incredibly motivated, brave almost to the point of madness and fiercely committed to Japan and its emperor.

Near Kampar, KMM youths earlier dispatched in Ipoh, faced a rain of bullets, forcing them to seek cover by crouching behind Japanese tanks positioned near huge boulders on the left side of the Ipoh-Kampar trunk road. These boulders, near the old Muslim cemetery, are no longer there. At this Kampar front, British forces fought valiantly, almost to their last drop of blood. Heavy fighting occurred, mostly on the right flank. Hours before New Year's Eve, hundreds of soldiers on both sides were either killed or maimed. As events turned out, three days later the British had to disengage themselves from the Japanese assault in Kampar and retreated south. I am not sure of the exact date, it was possibly around 3 January, that Kampar was overrun by the invaders.

Our convoy had to grapple with a new danger that could lead to loss of limb, if not life – land mines planted by British troops on both sides of the road to Kampar. But Japanese fighting men continued to press south all day and all night. As we crossed Kampar town in the pitch-black night, Japanese officers jumped down from their vehicles and used their booted feet to feel about for land mines. A most remarkable characteristic of Japanese military officers was that they were always in the forefront, leading their men in all situations, even now in the face of obvious peril. Whenever a Japanese officer detected a mine, it was exploded by pushing a car or a vehicle on to it. I also heard recurring rifle shots, like corn being popped, and exploding mines all around me in the airless night. We continued to move at a crawl, sometimes riding in a car, sometimes walking.

We reached Tapah, about fifteen miles from Kampar, at the break of the new day. The sun was much welcomed by the Japanese. No damage to property was evident in the area we passed through except for the house of Captain Hamid Khan (later Education Minister of Malaysia), which he later informed me was plundered by Australian soldiers.

The Malay folk of Tapah town stepped out of their homes to catch a glimpse of the Japanese soldiers. Clearly, there was no trace of welcome on their faces. Instead, there was a plethora of mixed emotions, mostly, looks of disbelief and wonder. Would these Asian newcomers improve their lives for the better? Doubts were aplenty. Perhaps a few Malays harboured hopes that the new power would be benevolent and grant them Independence, or at least, a better life. It was a fact that most pre-war Malays knew little about what Independence meant.

As we drove through Tapah town, which I knew like the back of my hand, I caught sight of many old friends from my Agricultural Assistant stint ten years earlier. The aforementioned Captain Hamid was a FMS Volunteer Officer friend whose lounge suit I had worn to my wedding,

was still in his Volunteer Force shorts. He told me that he had withdrawn from the warfront at Bidor, embittered by Australian soldiers' looting his house.

I pulled Captain Hamid aside and advised him to shed his Volunteer Force shorts instantly and to stay out of the Japanese way. "Believe me, Hamid, the Japanese will not leave you alone if they ever find out you were a Volunteer Force Officer. The least they would do to you is drag you south with them." I recounted to him that while in Ipoh, the Japanese were extremely interested in the name, rank and capability of the most senior British Army officer in Bidor. Realising how close he was to the 'tiger's mouth', Captain Hamid made himself scarce.

In Tapah, I heard intense hostilities were raging in Slim River, where British troops had hastily formed another line of defence. Many war analysts have described this Slim River clash as a decisive one in Peninsular Malaya. Days later, the Japanese would break through British defence positions. When British troops withdrew from Slim River, they virtually lost North Malaya, and the largest city in Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, lay open to Japanese troops.

In the course of my move with the Japanese, I encountered many dead bodies of British soldiers, a few in their armoured cars, others strewn all over the place, but absolutely no sign of Japanese bodies. I wondered how that could be, until I detected a small, but efficient squad. This group of Japanese rode on bicycles, just like most Japanese soldiers, but instead of uniforms, they wore pants and singlets, with a small towel wound around their necks. In place of arms, they carried small digging spades and, sometimes, bunches of *sawi* (spinach mustard vegetable) on their bicycle handles. While some carefully lifted bodies of Japanese soldiers for burial, others cleaned the spilt blood of their fallen colleagues off the streets and vehicles until no trace of blood was left anywhere.

Slim River was, I think, taken on 7 January 1942. Japanese soldiers were seen taking shelter from explosives and shells in trenches dug on both sides of the Slim River road. Again, the ditches were dug with the same small spades, just the right size for the generally small and short Japanese soldiers. Advancing south with F Kikan, sometimes in a car, sometimes on foot, and sometimes in boats, every step was painful as my legs were still weak from my nerve debility. What could I do but advance? The Japanese promise in Taiping that "Four Japanese soldiers can carry you on a chair!" was mere lip service.

Since Ipoh, where some Japanese took umbrage at my open criticism against the despicable behaviour of certain soldiers, I sensed shifty eyes watching my every move. But I was determined to reach Kuala Lumpur.

As KMM Vice President and the most senior KMM leader not imprisoned, I felt responsible for the youths I had said goodbye to in Ipoh.

I noticed a concrete bridge in Trolak still intact. Why did the British let it be? Did they not have time to destroy it? Before the invasion, white men had sneered that Japanese pilots could not drop bombs on target because they had slit eyes and were brought up strapped to their mothers' backs. How wrong! I have seen Japanese planes dropping anti-personnel bombs just a few yards from a bridge, not to destroy the structures, but merely to scare British troops into beating a faster retreat, akin to scaring a school of fish slowly (but surely) into the trap that lay waiting in Singapore.

A British General once observed that tanks were not suitable for Malaya because of its difficult terrain. But in Slim River, I saw five Japanese tanks, just light ones, tear asunder the British defence line, leaving British, Australian and Indian troops in total disarray.² In the ensuing confusion and hasty pullout, the British left behind tons of arms, such as pistols, revolvers, automatics, tommy guns, rifles, machine guns, hand grenades and countless rounds of ammunition, not to mention food, medicine and other supplies,³ as well as dead colleagues.

British troops had planned to hold out at Slim River for a while, but the appearance of five 12-tonne Japanese medium sized tanks compelled them to scurry south in hasty retreat. The British forces did not have time to destroy Trolak's concrete bridge as the Japanese tanks had devoured a British armoured car left at the point. I was sorry to see an innocent Australian soldier dead at the wheel of the armoured-car while his friend, equally young, sat next to him, also lifeless.

Tanjung Malim

We entered the next big town, Tanjung Malim, while it was still smoking and smelling of explosives. Small fires could be seen here and there. I noticed steel pipes about six inches in diameter placed along the railway line, with their 'barrels' pointing upwards. The British had hoped to dupe Japanese pilots into believing that these pipes were trench mortars. I told myself, "The British are really in bad shape. The war in Europe must have consumed a lot of their weapons!"

The Tanjung Malim Rest House looked like a pen where two bulls had wrestled for supremacy. I spent a night there after it had been swept clean of dirt, debris and broken glass. I took no chances! I called upon all the silent spirits guarding the locality, to allow me to stay there a while and to protect me from all kinds of human and spiritual dangers.

Major Fujiwara whispered to a Japanese officer to sleep on the veranda just outside my door, to safeguard me from enemy retaliation. Or was it to prevent me from escaping? Until today, 34 years later, I do not know his true motive. I may have misread Major Fujiwara's kind intention as he was truly a gentle-hearted person. His family was close to the Japanese Imperial Household as they had the responsibility for selecting royal brides and grooms.

Wherever we stopped, Japanese soldiers who saw the 'F' flag on our car whispered with fear and complete reverence, "Fujiwara's kar." I don't know why they did not use the Japanese word '*jidosha*' for 'car'. As for food, we ate whatever there was along the way, which was not much. Most shops and houses had already been deserted by their occupants, who had sought safety in the interior. Only in Tanjung Malim was I able to coax an old Punjabi to sell me the *chapati* (pancake) he was cooking on the five-foot way of his house. He was completely oblivious to the war that was raging on around him. Yet, he was not blind!

I often had to stomach the horrible-tasting salted, pickled vegetable the Japanese were fond of. Seeing Japanese soldiers cook rice in the shallow tin pots they carried on their waists answered one of my earlier questions: "How can Malays go to war because cooking rice is not a simple matter? And the Malays can hardly pass a day without rice!"

All along the fifty miles from Tanjung Malim to Kuala Lumpur, I noticed deserted Malay houses with the 'F' or KAME symbols pasted on their front doors. Evidently, KMM youths had passed through these villages and had performed one of the tasks assigned in Ipoh, which was to paste the feared 'F' notices on houses to avoid plunder. They also advised villagers to temporarily leave their homes and to stay away from possible danger.

Clearly, no welcome mat was laid out for the newcomers from the north. Instead, the people ran into the interior, to save their families, after having been warned about Japanese soldiers. In one *kampung* near Kalumpang, several Malay boys approached me when I was sitting in an open car with Japanese officers around me. When I started to speak in Malay, one of them shouted to his friends, "Oi, there is a Malay among them!" Ohta, the Japanese barber from Alor Star and member of the F Kikan, snarled, "Don't make noise!" I was livid. He was a mere barber who could play tennis. Possibly, a spy dressed as a barber. Why weren't the British cautious of people like him?

Moving little by little in all modes of transport, we passed Kalumpang, Kuala Kubu Lama and Rawang, all as silent as ghost towns. At another Malay village, Malay boys welcomed our convoy by waving their hands. They shouted, "Oi, I see a Malay with them!"

Arrived in Kuala Lumpur, 11 January 1942⁴

F Kikan members and I arrived in Kuala Lumpur at 11.00 am on 11 January, Japanese infantry marching behind us. We stopped in front of the Coliseum Cinema along Batu Road (now Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman) to wait for the KMM youth sent from Ipoh. Feeling extremely responsible for their wellbeing, I was anxious to see them.

Kuala Lumpur town was absolutely lifeless except for the advancing Japanese. Where had all the 400,000 people of the largest town in Malaya vanished to? No more moving vehicles, no more policemen, no more people who used to walk up and down the length of Kuala Lumpur's busiest street, Batu Road. Apart from Japanese troops and a multitude of vehicles, there were just a couple of Indians bolting with bales of fabric. Captain Saito grabbed my automatic pistol from me, took aim and fired a shot. He missed. They were too far away. The Japanese penalty for looting was shooting without court hearing.

Suddenly, the Japanese Infantry Column Officer just behind us saw an old Chinese man leaning against a pillar in front of the Coliseum Cafe with blood streaming down his face. He ordered his Medical Orderly to treat the injured man. In my heart, I said, "There is indeed a silver lining in every cloud!"

KMM member Onan and Yamashita nipped into a shop, Taiaan and Co., also along Batu Road, where Yamashita had worked before the Invasion. There, they lifted a large floor tile to retrieve a Japanese flag, which was immediately flown in the capital city. Kuala Lumpur suffered little damage as the British had wisely declared it an 'open city' as they retreated south towards Bukit Mantin (Mantin Pass).

We inched down Batu Road because its entire length was chock-a-block with Japanese cars, trucks, soldiers, weapons and supplies. As we approached the beautiful green lawn of the Selangor Club, here and there, I saw KMM youth waiting for me in pairs. I thanked God for their safety. Everyone looked dead exhausted, but excited. They shouted, "There he is!" as they saw me. Among them were Chikgu Mohd Isa, Wan Daud Ahmad, Mohd Mustafa and Nur Yusuf Maxwell.

Kuala Lumpur

We used the chambers of the prestigious Selangor Club, a white man's club, as the KMM meeting room. After some investigation, I found that only two of our fifth columnists had not arrived in Kuala Lumpur; they had fallen ill along the way and had returned home. We found out later that the two were safe in Ipoh. The tired but high-spirited youths were

feted with all kinds of expensive cakes and cookies found at the Club. Bottles of vintage wine, champagne and liquor lined the shelves, but being Muslims, none would touch these drinks.

The Japanese officers praised them for their fighting spirit, discipline and courage, especially when they saw teenager Mohd Mustafa⁵ trying to handle a British bren-gun carrier. Grinning happily, the Japanese clapped their hands and shouted “*Yoroshi!*” (good).

My mind went back to an afternoon two years earlier when a white member of the Club had criticised my presence there. The Canadian Mr Dawson, Assistant Principal of the School of Agriculture, had taken me to the Club for afternoon tea after a marching drill. Mr Dawson, who abhorred discrimination in whatever form, became livid at the unkind remarks hurled at me. He answered sharply, “We agriculturists always stick together,” and left the club swearing he would resign his membership. Mr Dawson, who often spoke about liberty, equality and human rights, knew what the ‘colour bar’ meant in British Malaya.

After that first decent meal in weeks, the Malay fifth columnists in Kuala Lumpur were all taken to a two-storey house along Jalan Swettenham that would now become the KMM House. For his own HQ, Major Fujiwara chose a nearby bungalow sitting on a hill with a view of three roads. Members of the IIL (Indian Independence League) were housed in another building.

In yet another bungalow was another group of fifth columnists, Indonesian small traders and shopkeepers, mostly from Sumatra, who had travelled from the north of Malaya to serve the Japanese with the express purpose of driving the Dutch out of their homeland. Aged between twenty and thirty, they were being trained by Japanese officers for certain assignments to be undertaken upon their return to Sumatra. Later that month,⁶ two groups of these Indonesians were sent from the coast of Kuala Selangor in two small boats, with just the stars to guide them across the Melaka Straits.

I stumbled upon yet another group of fifth columnists who looked very tough and were busy gambling. Apparently, they had been brought by the Japanese from Sungai Golok, a small Kelantan-Thai border town. They did not know much about politics and were pure mercenaries. I was told that in peacetime, they were mostly smugglers.

F Kikan officers did not like the various fifth column groups meeting or talking with one another. But one day, I managed to meet with Pritam Singh, the IIL leader. This meeting reaffirmed our friendship forged in Ipoh weeks earlier. After enquiring about KMM and its progress, he asked, “What political negotiations have been made by KMM President Ibrahim

Yaakub with the Japanese?" I told him I did not know as all arrangements had been secretly made by Ibrahim without my knowledge. "And now Ibrahim is in a Singapore prison!" I then added that I would ask the Japanese.

Pritam Singh looked at me for a long while and then gave some carefully worded, but incisive advice, "Mustapha, you are still young. Be careful that you aren't fooled by them." On his side, he did not have to worry as everything had already been arranged by their great leader, Subhas Chandra Bose. He concluded his advice, "Be careful Mustapha. I don't want you to have any regrets." He left me with a thousand and one questions swimming in my head. Did he know something that I did not see or had yet to see? (For the record, Pritam Singh died in a plane crash en route to Japan just weeks after the fall of Singapore.)

In Kuala Lumpur, our group grew in number with the addition of KMM members who had escaped the British Police dragnet, including Secretary M.N. Othman; Zainal Abidin Kassim (son of 'Rich Man Pak Kassim'), who joined me en route from his home in Tapah Road; Abdul Rahman Tambi; Kiman (who died in Bukit Tinggi, Sumatra); Saidi Hashim from Kajang (who died in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur); Hamzah Alang (who died in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur); Naning; Hashim bin Mat Dali and some members from Puchong, Serdang and other areas in Selangor.

Gathering Malay Fifth Column Members in Kuala Lumpur

Assembling more KMM members to form the southern force to move down the peninsula was our primary task in Kuala Lumpur. Onan, a former student at the School of Agriculture, rushed to Serdang to gather as many as possible from the School. Among them were Ahmad bin Mohd Amin (Perak), Johar bin Kerong (Selangor), Baheran bin Alang Ahmad (deceased, from Perak), Ma'arof Hassan; Mohd Rais bin Abdul Karim (deceased, from Negeri Sembilan) and others. They were provided with basic warfare training, but were not armed before being sent south.

In Kuala Lumpur, we reiterated our request that the Japanese entrust all Malays, regardless of whether they were ordinary citizens, police personnel, military personnel or Volunteer Force members, to the KMM to investigate allegations against them. KMM members also advised villagers living along the roads and railway tracks, which they felt would be used by Japanese troops, to quickly move away temporarily. This was our ploy to save Malays from being killed.

Johar bin Kerong⁷ has described his experiences moving south from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. Do make your own judgement. Did this fifth

columnist help anyone, and if he did, who were they? The colonialists who had just fled, or the new colonialists about to establish themselves? Please also read my testament at the beginning of this memoir.

Malay Fifth Column Activities

My second task in Kuala Lumpur was to write a report on the achievements of the Malay fifth columnists from the Kampar battleground down to Kuala Lumpur. I discovered no sabotage or subversive activities. A member claimed that the Trolak concrete bridge was saved from destruction after he and some villagers managed to sever the fuse of the dynamite planted underneath it. But a Japanese made a counter claim that a Tank Corps Captain had dived out of his tank to chop off the fuse with his samurai sword. However, the captain was killed by British sniper bullets.

When I handed over the completed reports, each covering two members who moved in pairs, Major Fujiwara and F Kikan members looked pleased and satisfied. Secret weapons, I confirmed, were not used at all. I added a comment that these secret weapons were 'not up-to-date' compared to the simple-to-handle British hand grenades. Japanese weapons needed time to be activated. Their secret hand explosives in the form of Libby's fruit cans were cumbersome; one had to punch a hole, fix a screw and light a fuse before throwing it. Ten minutes were needed to heat up a small coal-like explosive before it could be used to destroy trucks.

In conclusion, I suggested that Japanese weapon specialists design one in the form of a *durian* (a fruit with thick thorny skin and pungent pulpy flesh), a local favourite. "This is after all durian season! If Malays were seen carrying some on their bicycles, no one would suspect a thing!" Several Japanese Officers broke into spontaneous laughter, but a couple gave me dagger looks. How dare a Malay criticise weapons of their Imperial Army! I ended the meeting stating that my suggestion was made in good faith.

Demanding Malaya's Independence:⁸ 14-17 January 1942

I believe it is the right of every citizen to strive for Independence, no matter what the consequences. Taking into account Japanese recognition of KMM as the sole body representing Malays, I felt the time was ripe to use KMM as a pressure group to demand that Japan proclaim Malaya's Independence.

My unofficial political tutor Sutan Jenain had once said, “Struggling towards Independence is the obligation and right of every citizen. And it should be undertaken as a group endeavour.” I had also read a freedom fighter’s comment that: “Independence is best demanded during a war, or just after it has ended.” This was then to me the most opportune moment for this honourable task. After all, was the Japanese slogan not ‘Asia for the Asians’? Was Malaya not for the Malays?

But at the same time, I recalled a 1938 movie entitled *Strange As It May Seem* in which Japanese military killed all its fifth columnists soon after the fall of Manchuria. Nevertheless, I was convinced it was my right and duty to demand Malaya’s Independence.

At the KMM House in Kuala Lumpur, Saidi Hashim, Kiman and I composed and wrote lyrics to a song to promote our demand for Japanese proclamation of Malaya’s Independence. But for it to be acceptable, we had to ensure the lyrics pleased them. In our hearts, we hoped the song could later become Independent Malaya’s National Anthem by just amending its lyrics:

Translation of the song

Japanese troops have arrived
Let us assist them
Japanese troops have arrived
They came to support us.

Japanese troops have arrived
Let us assist them
Japanese troops have arrived
They came to free us.

Japanese troops have arrived
Let us assist them
Japanese troops have arrived
They came to liberate us.

I don’t remember the rest of the lyrics and both Kiman and Saidi have passed away. A very similar tune can be heard today over our air-waves.⁹ We presented this ‘KMM Song’ to the Japanese on 14 January 1942 as an initial step towards demanding that Japan proclaim Malaya’s Independence. When a Japanese interpreter started to translate the lyrics, the Japanese officers present in the room were full of smiles. But as soon as the interpreter came to the line, ‘liberate us’, their expressions changed drastically and they blurted “*Nai!*” (cannot).

I then disclosed that KMM's secret name was Kesatuan Malaya Merdeka or Independent Malaya Union. They were shocked. They did not think Malays were politically conscious enough to harbour aspirations of Independence. You can imagine my feelings when I heard "Nai!" Why reject our demand when they had declared India's independence in Bangkok on 12 December 1941? Malaya, like India, was also a British colony! But I was not shocked. I had read many history books. Colonialists were all the same. Furthermore, had Pritam Singh not prepared me for this? In my heart I told myself, "Now, what is KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub going to say when I tell him about this episode?" I had let the balloon rise into the sky and I now knew which way the wind was blowing. I left the building, determined to find alternatives towards this sacred objective of *Merdeka*. God, I believed, would give me the necessary perseverance.

Three days after the rejection, I headed a KMM delegation, this time to meet the Japanese Political Bureau's Commander. This delegation, which included Onan, was given a national level reception. When the Japanese asked about KMM's objectives, I explained once again that KMM aspired for Independence. Had the Japanese not come to Malaya, we would have sought other ways to get rid of British colonialists. The actual meaning of KMM, I again stressed, was Independent Malaya Union, not Young Malay Union.

The Japanese Commander asked, "If KMM is a political body aspiring for Independence, where is your national flag, national anthem and constitution?" I reasoned that our flag is *Sang Saka Merah Putih*, the white and red flag. He responded, "That belongs to Indonesia." I argued that red and white have been to Malays the colours of "truth and valour" since the days of the warrior, Hang Tuah¹⁰ in 16th century Melaka. Yet, the colours somehow ended up with Indonesia. "This question of the flag can be discussed with Indonesia later," I insisted.¹¹ "As for the national anthem, we have just composed it several days ago. As for the Constitution, we will show it to you later as we are in the midst of war."

An atmosphere of anxiety hung over the room as the Japanese Commander paced its entire length, thinking seriously over the matter. He then began a rigmarole about why he could not promise us anything. I was growing impatient with the long list of excuses. Finally, he delivered an allegorical but clear answer in fluent English. "Let the Japanese be the father. Malays, Chinese and Indians live like a family. However, if the Malay child is thin, and needs more milk, we will give him more milk." Hearing that, I told myself, "Looks like the Malay people's hope of gaining Independence through the Japanese is over. Its clarion call of

‘Asia for the Asians’ is empty talk.” Stepping out of the room, I told myself, “I must find another way to free Malaya from colonialists.”

Strangely, Ibrahim later admonished me for demanding Malaya’s Independence from the Japanese.¹² This happened in Singapore on 16 February, a day after the capitulation of Singapore. He snarled at me, “What? Are you crazy? You are lucky not to have been beheaded.” I replied, “I was not crazy, and if my head is appropriate to adorn some junction in Singapore, go ahead, cut it off. What I had demanded from the Japanese was my right! What is the use of us forming KMM if not to clinch Independence? I am willing to lose more for the sake of Independence. I have every right!”

After the Japanese rebuff of KMM’s demand, without their knowledge I formed a body called the KMM Youth Front or Badan Pemuda KMM. It was made up of members – Onan, M. N. Othman, Abdul Kadir Adabi, Hamzah Alang, Abdul Rahman Tambi, Johar bin Kerong, Hamzah Tajuddin, Mohd Mustafa bin Ali, Ahmad bin Mohd Amin, Zainal Abidin Kassim, Kiman, Saidi Hashim and many others whose names I have forgotten. I was Chairman but this authority would later be handed to Ibrahim. For secrecy and security, we maintained our normal KMM appearance. We hoped this front could later be activated to counter the Japanese. That, in fact, was our main motivation.

I reminded KMM members, “You must all, from now on, keep in mind that KMM has been used by the Japanese for their own interests. Japan is also a colonial power. We will now carry on to Singapore, to free our friends from British prisons! After that, we will reorganise as a front to counter the Japanese. In our move south, do be careful. Do not lose your lives in support of the Japanese cause.”

Kuala Lumpur in January and Early February 1942

I wanted KMM to be many things: a vehicle towards Independence, a body supported by all Malays, and a saviour for Malays caught in a war between two colonial powers. For KMM to be supported by Malays at all levels, it must be honourable, just, nationalistic and humane. KMM’s connection with the Japanese would be used to save Malay lives, chastity and property.

Japanese atrocities were plain for all to see. Four human heads were displayed on spikes along Batu Road near the Jalan Ipoh-Jalan Raja Muda junction. A mischievous Japanese soldier had stuck ‘Craven A’ cigarettes in their mouths, exposing gold-capped teeth. But was the public scared by these ghoulish exhibits? Just across the street, gaming tables were

crammed in a corner and gamblers were shouting out bets. The circumstances were ideal for gambling, with no British police or other authorities to stop them. Several armed Japanese soldiers merely patrolled the streets. I dare bet that even if several decapitated heads were placed on the gaming tables, the hardcore gamblers would still have carried on.

Driving around Kuala Lumpur, I came across two white soldiers taking shelter in a Malay school at Cheras. Malay villagers surrounding them appealed to me, "Enchik, please take these two to the Japanese. If not, we will suffer the consequences! Please take them away!" I did not know what I should do. How did these Malays know that I was with the Japanese? I was not wearing the 'F' arm-band. Maybe they did not know, but seeing that I had a car, they figured I was able to remove this 'plague' from their village.

To help them, I agreed. I signalled to the two white men to get into my car and they did so without question. They sat quietly in the back as I drove towards the F Kikan HQ. Luckily, no sentry challenged me along the way. I was truly afraid that the two white men would be snatched from me, and that could be fatal for them, and maybe for me too. We arrived at the F Kikan HQ safely. As I handed them to a Japanese interpreter, he asked very simply, "Why did you bring them back? It was easier to just get rid of them there!" With bated breath, I waited outside the HQ's front door until the decision came – the soldiers would be sent to a detention camp. I was relieved beyond words that they would not be killed.

In my effort to save the lives of the two white soldiers, I was unable to utter one word to them, even though by nature I am talkative. They too acted like two dumb persons. More than twenty years later, the reasons finally dawned on me. One, I felt truly sorry for them. Two, I was ashamed. I was an educated Malay, but I must have appeared like a traitor in their eyes, unlike other Malays they knew. Finally, all three of us could speak the same language, although we were of different races. In retrospect, they were blessed that I, not the Japanese, had found them.

I heard the British Government had left behind local intelligence agents to carry on covert operations during the Japanese Occupation. An agent code-named 'Lion' was spying on the ILL. I warned KMM members to be alert and to go about in pairs to avoid being abducted or killed. KMM House was closely guarded at all times. In fact we moved several times to avoid untoward incidents. F Kikan officers continued to advise me to be cautious in my movements and to inform them of any communists, remnants of British forces and whatever other elements that could threaten security.

Luckily, history books had given me insight into a newly invaded country. The pre-war Malayan public knew little about communists and communism. What I had heard was that communists were instigators who wreaked havoc. The Malay press consistently pictured them as evil, godless and wanton. Some Malay papers described them as the enemy of God. Muslim religious teachers likened them to the Kaum Muda, a group they deemed young reformers.

As for me, my political mentor Sutan Jenain had taught me that while Japan and its allies Germany and Italy were fascists, Russia was a communist country. These two ideologies would be in constant conflict until one became crippled. Communists were leaders who led the working class in times of peace and shouldered arms in times of war or when threatened by fascists.

While in Kuala Lumpur, a Volunteer Officer, Captain Zainal Abidin bin Ali, came to see me at KMM House. He told me he was unwilling to move south after Gemas with the British forces. When he claimed to have destroyed two coach-loads of weapons so they would not fall into British hands, I politely nodded my head at his tall story. Zainal requested KMM help to send him home to Kuantan, Pahang. With great pain, we managed to persuade Japanese officers to give us a car, travel passes and petrol, since all three items were extremely difficult to obtain. Captain Zainal Abidin and several others were soon loaded into an Austin 8, some sitting inside, some hanging off the side, some sitting on the bonnet and four people lying face down on the hood. Imagine, this was a KMM gesture to help Malays. Hopefully, we would receive their support. But like most good deeds, it went forgotten.

Another man, a Malay Co-operative Officer, came to befriend me, enquiring about KMM affairs. I knew he was a British intelligence agent. His name is mentioned in W.R. Roff's book, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Vouching he had ruined all boats off Kuala Selangor so that the British could not catch hold of them, he requested to see a Japanese Commander to claim a reward for this sabotage work. What? He underestimated my intelligence. Did he not know that I was fully aware of his other job?

I pulled him into a room where I revealed my knowledge of his 'second job'. If he hoped to be rewarded, he might just get it in the form of a samurai sword zinging down his neck. I ordered him out of KMM House before The Chained Lion¹³ could get to him. This Malay Co-operative Officer left with a lesson he would never forget. This was the calibre of British intelligence agents! Why were the British fond of employing Co-operative Officers, Education Officers and some Civil Service Officers for such jobs?

After Kuala Lumpur was overrun, I had the opportunity to read hundreds of reports written by local intelligence officers. Not surprisingly, I discovered that many senior government officers, and even the Malay Rulers, were under British surveillance. I was disgusted to read adverse reports that ‘poured sand into rice-bowls’. In a black box were files on the Pahang Malay Uprising, about Tok Janggut in Kelantan and other Malay fighters. These perished in the turmoil of war. I wish I had kept them.

The intelligence agent watching KMM was a Sikh. Speaking of intelligence agents, let me tell you about one I later encountered in Johore. He told me he had been assigned to nab Tan Malaka in Mecca. But when he did find Tan Malaka, he did not have the heart to arrest him, as he was completely committed to his cause. I said to myself, “You were hoping to catch Tan Malaka? How many of the world’s best agents have been despatched to capture him, but have failed.”

Notes

1. According to Col Masanobu Tsuji in his book *Singapore 1941-1942: The Japanese Version of the Malayan Campaign of World War II*, more than 250 bridges, big and small, had to be repaired by the Japanese in the seventy days they took to move from North Malaya to Singapore.
2. See page 174 of the same book by Col Tsuji.
3. See page 175 of the same book by Col Tsuji.
4. Confirmed by Lt General Fujiwara Iwaichi in his book *F Kikan* (p. 134) “On the morning of 11 January, we entered Kuala Lumpur.”
5. An account by fifth columnist Mohd Mustafa is included as an appendix to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 7, pp. 590-6).
6. According to Lt General Fujiwara Iwaichi in his book *F Kikan* (p. 141), the date of departure was 16 January 1942.
7. Johar bin Kerong, a loyal KMM member dedicated to our cause. When World War II broke out, he was working in the Poultry Unit of the School of Agriculture at Serdang. At Onan’s invitation, Johar became a fifth columnist and moved from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. During the Japanese Occupation, he returned to work in the School at Serdang. He spent his retirement days at his home in Jalan Enggang, Datuk Keramat, Kuala Lumpur. He gave me a lengthy statement describing his move down the peninsula as a Japanese fifth columnist (see Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 24, pp. 637-46). He was the luckiest KMM member, having witnessed the British surrender of Singapore to the Japanese.
8. This was the first of my three attempts to gain Malaya’s Independence. This episode is recorded on page 103 in *Red Star over Malaya* by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng: “In fact, in January 1942, after the Japanese force had entered Kuala Lumpur, a conflict of aims had arisen when Mustapha Hussain asked the Japanese commanders to back a proclamation of Malay independence, citing Japan’s promise to liberate Malaya from British rule. But the request was turned down.”
9. This is sung to the tune of ‘Malaysia Berjaya’.
10. During the Safar Day celebrations in early Malaya, the bunting decorating bullock

carts was red and white. Red and white were also the colours of the Malay warrior, Hang Tuah, and later the colour of KMM and PKMM (Malay Nationalist Party).

11. *Translator's note:* In 1996, after it was announced that I was one of five winners of the country's first biography writing competition organised by ESSO and GAPENA, Mr Ooi Jim Pooi, my father's friend from the fifties, contacted me through playwright Datuk Syed Alwi. In the fifties, Mr Ooi's office had been beside my father's small insurance agency in Taiping. He was active in MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) and often visited our home, where I used to serve him coffee. So, in 1996, Mr Ooi and I met again after forty years. I almost fell off my chair when he apologised profusely for losing the Independence of Malaya flag that he said my father had designed in 1942 to support his demand for Independence from the Japanese. I did not know the flag existed. According to Mr Ooi, my father who had feared a British Special Branch raid on his Taiping office had asked Mr Ooi to hide the flag. It was red and white, but had a star, which Mr Ooi believed was yellow. Mr Ooi stuck the flag into a nondescript envelope, hid it in his office, but lost it when he moved to Kuala Lumpur years later. Mr Ooi said he wished he had the funds to make a movie on my father's life. He described my father as "a man not only true to his struggle and principles, but one who could not be bought with money." Mr Ooi said he knew this for a fact because in the fifties, he and another MCA man had tried to lure my father into certain political schemes with the promise of considerable wealth, but my father refused the offer.
12. In the interview by Robert Reece with Ibrahim Yaakub in Jakarta in February 1973, among other things, Ibrahim said: "Mustapha had already asked Fujiwara to proclaim an independent Malaya. I told him he had made a great blunder. They will behead you. Mustapha went back to Perak."
13. The Chained Lion was Onan Haji Siraj.

Saving Three Malay Police Officers¹

In January 1942, while talking with KMM Secretary M.N. Othman, a Japanese officer burst into KMM House summoning me to the F Kikan HQ for something extremely important. As my legs were in pain, I took the car. Several Japanese officers were waiting for me at the large bungalow, now the F Kikan HQ. My heart was thumping.

In a room upstairs, Onan Haji Siraj and several Japanese officers were waiting anxiously. I saw Major Fujiwara sitting under a mosquito net² as he was suffering from malaria. Just before entering the room, I saw a plump Malay man with a bushy moustache standing outside. Inside were two Malays, one a slender and very handsome man, the other a big-built, fair-skinned man with the ramrod straight posture of either a police or military officer. I recognised the second man, Jalaluddin Abu Bakar, as he was from my wife's hometown, Temoh.

As it turned out, the three Malays, all British Police Officers, had been arrested by Onan in their homes and brought to the F Kikan HQ in a car belonging to one of the three. The Japanese officers looked grim while the three Malays were pale with unspeakable fear. As soon as I entered the room, all eyes focused on me. Onan got up to pace the room, with his teeth gnashing in anger. In my heart, I said, "What now? Who else has he arrested?"

When Major Fujiwara ordered me to interrogate the three, I asked KMM member Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman to assist me by taking notes. It was good that Major Fujiwara still remembered his promise to consult me on all matters pertaining to Malay detainees. Luckier still, Major Fujiwara continued to respect me as a Malay leader and referred all matters to me, and not to Onan.

I started my questioning under the full observation of everyone in the room. Whatever I did not want written, I signalled to Chikgu Mohd Isa by nudging his foot under the table. To convince the Japanese officers, I growled my questions harshly and rudely. I also snapped at the detainees when they were slow in responding.

The first man interrogated identified himself as a member of the royal family, Raja Ahmed Hisham bin Raja Abdul Malik (later Datuk Seri, Raja Di Hilir Perak, and second in line to the Perak throne), Malay Division Chief of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) of the British Police Force. He was, in effect, the most senior Malay CID Officer in Malaya.

When he revealed his monthly income, I asked loudly, "What? For that small pay, you are willing to sell your own people?" The Japanese officers who understood English well smiled broadly. Major Fujiwara enquired what the question was. He also beamed when it was translated to him. If I am asked to act today as I did on that day, I am sure I would fail miserably.

During the interrogation, Raja Ahmed Hisham admitted arresting more than fifty KMM members in early December. In addition, he admitted to detaining about twenty-five Japanese citizens and having used force on them. I said to myself, "Good Lord, this man has signed his own death warrant!" I told Chikgu Mohd Isa not to write the words 'used force' and 'more than fifty KMM members' in the report.

I took it upon myself to explain to the Japanese that the Malay man under interrogation had made the arrests 'under orders' and that he was merely 'carrying out his duties'. Raja Ahmed Hisham was indeed blessed that it was Major Fujiwara who had followed the interrogation. A young Japanese lieutenant who spoke some English got up to suggest, "*Kirr, Kirr!*" (Kill, Kill). I replied, "Not yet! Not so fast with the judgement. The interrogation is not over yet." I was playing for time, trying to think of a way to save the three. Onan interrupted in Malay, "What is the point of carrying on with the investigation? Just finish it!" Knowing his irascible nature, I answered softly, "Just wait a minute. There are two others."

I shifted my attention to the second detainee, Jalaluddin Abu Bakar. I did not let anyone in the room know I knew him. When asked about his duties, Jalaluddin described himself as a Mandarin-speaking Malay CID officer specifically trained by the British to keep surveillance on communist elements. Almost instantly, my thoughts crystallised and an idea jumped out. The man's answer was a prayer come true! Turning to Chief Interpreter Otaguro, who spoke fluent English and was the one F Kikan officer who consistently accepted my advice on Malay matters, I said, "We have found a man most useful to us! We can use him like the British did, to detect communist elements."

The irate young Japanese lieutenant stood up again, and this time, his voice rose to a falsetto as he suggested, "Kirr 'Number One'. 'Number Two' never mind!" Now keeping an unwavering gaze on Major Fujiwara,

I continued, "We will lose a great deal if we kill 'Number One'. Just listen to what I have to say. We get 'Number Two' to go out to collect information, and then give it to 'Number One' to analyse and write reports which I will bring to you."

I gave the interpreter all the time necessary to translate my proposal in full. Then, silence fell. We could have heard a pin drop. Everyone was waiting for Major Fujiwara's decision. After what seemed like an eternity, Major Fujiwara announced his verdict in just one word, "*Yoroshi!*" (good). Hearing that, I said in my heart, "Allah, the Almighty, has saved one of my own!"

When asked about Hashim Misai, the moustached 'Number Three' who had been waiting outside, I said it was not necessary to question him. We could just use him to track anti-Japanese elements. The young lieutenant was dissatisfied. Like a bolt of lightning, he asked, "If these men escape, who will be responsible?" I replied that I would be, three Malay lives against mine.

Onan was extremely disappointed with Major Fujiwara's decision. He had hoped for commendations for the arrests of these three top-ranking Malay police officers. Likewise, his hopes to supplant me as KMM leader, as I was often suffering rheumatic pains, were dashed. Immediately after the incident, Onan got up, pulled out his pistol, twirled it like a cowboy and pointed it in the direction of Raja Ahmed Hisham. One of the Japanese officers told him, "Don't do that!"

Protecting the Three CID Officers

The three detainees were brought to KMM House. Raja Ahmed Hisham was sent to an upstairs room, while Jalaluddin was placed downstairs. A few days later, I helped the third man escape. I pretended to ask him to go out of the building to fetch my shoes, but whispered into his ears in Malay, "Scram and don't come back!"

Jalaluddin went out everyday to bring back information on communist elements, but there was nothing really new or significant. It was just a means to stay alive. I also asked him to visit the family of Raja Ahmed Hisham. Sometimes, we went out together to look for food.

One night, a Dutch Martin-bomber flew just above the KMM House along Jalan Maxwell. KMM members ran helter-skelter without any regard for the detainees' safety. I rushed upstairs to fetch Raja Ahmed Hisham. I told him plainly, "My life depends on yours. If you escape, I will lose mine!" After he vowed not to take the opportunity to escape, we both hid under a monsoon drain culvert. Some members later com-

mented, "You should have just let him be. Let him die!" I replied that according to international law, prisoners of war should be saved first.

Saving Raja Ahmed Hisham's life that night divided my followers' loyalties. They read my action as pro-British. When the British returned to power later, I am sure these members realised that I had done the right thing, and not just on humanitarian grounds. Had I listened to them, many of us, especially KMM members, may have been imprisoned or even sentenced to death. This was especially true if one of the detainees had died. Furthermore, Raja Ahmed Hisham was a nephew of the reigning Sultan of Perak, Sultan Abdul Aziz, and was later second in line to the throne. Some individuals accused of crimes committed during the Japanese Occupation were later sentenced to ten years' imprisonment by the British Military Administration, though some, like Onan managed to escape.

Protecting Raja Ahmed Hisham

Looking after Raja Ahmed Hisham was quite a task because he was 'wanted' by many people. One afternoon, Major Fujiwara informed me that the Japanese Military Police (Kempeitai) wanted to take Raja Ahmed Hisham to their HQ to be 'punished' for his 'unforgivable' crimes. I wondered how the Kempeitai knew about him and his whereabouts. Giving the excuse that we still needed Raja Ahmed Hisham's expertise to complete some intelligence reports, I advised Major Fujiwara to let him remain under our protection. I also appealed to Major Fujiwara, who belonged to a feudal family, to consider Raja Ahmed Hisham's blood ties with the Sultan of Perak. "Just think of the aftermath if a nephew of the Sultan was killed," I cautioned.

The Kempeitai officer left empty-handed. Raja Ahmed Hisham was indeed fortunate that Major Fujiwara considered such aspects. Otherwise, Raja Ahmed Hisham would have been subjected to a living hell at the hands of the dreaded Kempeitai.

Then came Enchik Tasa, a Malay of Javanese origin, whom I knew from my Port Dickson camping days. He brought his wife, a very influential Japanese lady and secretary to the Japanese Governor. The couple politely asked for Raja Ahmed Hisham's release, but when I advised Major Fujiwara not to agree, they turned rather aggressive. I responded, "You can take him right here and now, but should anything happen to him, I will take action against you, my friend Tasa. I have put my own life on the line!"

They were shocked into silence. I emphasised that looking after Raja Ahmed Hisham was not a simple matter. I then asked Tasa, "Did you

notice some Indian boys at the junction to Raja Ahmed Hisham's house?" He nodded his head. "They are sent by the Kempetai to observe his house." Tasa was alarmed. He apologised profusely and left. I told him to look up Raja Ahmad Hisham's family and assure them that he was safe.

Another afternoon, a uniformed Japanese soldier wearing long yellow boots came up the driveway. Based on experience, this man was no less than the feared executioner. Upon reaching KMM House, he drew his sword out and started a war dance. He 'whizzed' his sword in the air while his boots made the 'zerup, zerup' sound as he danced on the pebbly driveway. I signalled to someone to quickly summon Major Fujiwara to KMM House.

The uninvited guest continued to perform his war dance while walking towards our door. I don't know from where I got the courage, but I stood in the doorway, telling him not to enter. At that point in time, an F Kikan Officer arrived. After a short exchange of words, the executioner left to see Major Fujiwara. The executioner was apparently not from the Kempetai, but from another section. From the tone of his voice, it seemed Raja Ahmed Hisham was much despised. Japanese citizens released from detention may have described his actions against them.

After that, I asked Major Fujiwara for a 'Japanese amulet' (letter of authority) just in case other people came for Raja Ahmed Hisham. I gave this to KMM Secretary M.N. Othman as I had received orders to leave Kuala Lumpur to move south. This is clear from the three letters written by Raja Ahmed Hisham, Jalaluddin Abu Bakar and Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman.³

The Raja Ahmed Hisham story and many others lay buried in the inner recesses of my mind for 35 years. No one dared lift the veil. Historians have urged me to write about KMM, my World War II experience and the rise of Malay nationalism in Malaya, but I kept all these shut inside my heart. I only exposed a tiny fragment of the Raja Ahmed Hisham episode on 23 July 1974 in a talk at the History Department of the National University of Malaysia.

However, KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub's letter dated 20 May 1975 accusing me of 'arresting Raja Hisham'⁴ has forced me to divulge the whole story, to defend the truth and save my family from any unwarranted comments. This became especially necessary as Ibrahim sent copies of this letter to three Malay academicians⁵ and to then Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak.

I want to state categorically that it was not I who arrested the three CID officers and others. Ibrahim is libelling me to save his own reputation and interests. Is he trying to rewrite his role in Malaysian history so that

he will be allowed to return to his homeland? He abused the hard work by KMM members to become wealthy enough to set up and run a bank in Indonesia. In his letter, Ibrahim claimed to have released Raja Ahmed Hisham, but the truth is otherwise.

Raja Ahmed Hisham's car, a Morris 6-cylinder, was taken by his captor, Onan Haji Siraj, and left in Johore Baru. Later, when I was on my way home from Singapore after it fell, I looked for the car and brought it back to Kuala Lumpur to return it to Raja Ahmed Hisham. Sutan Jenain, who sent the car on my behalf, took that opportunity to preach to Raja Ahmed Hisham about the KMM, its noble intentions and its efforts to help the Malays. Sutan Jenain also appealed to Raja Ahmed Hisham to take another look at the Malay struggle.

When the British returned to power in 1945, I was imprisoned in Batu Gajah for almost a year. After my release, I was re-arrested, this time to be questioned by the British CID chief at his Kuala Lumpur office. On my way to the CID chief's office, I came across the three CID officers whose lives I had saved – Raja Ahmed Hisham, Jalaluddin Abu Bakar and Hashim Misai.

Hashim Misai rushed to kiss my hands. It was a most difficult emotional situation. Tears welled in my eyes at this extraordinary gesture of gratitude. Raja Ahmed Hisham was shocked to see me unkempt and emaciated – I was known as an immaculate dresser. He was also taken aback by Hashim's humble demonstration of gratitude. I managed to tell Raja Ahmed Hisham that there were many other people whose lives I had saved before I was brought to the CID office on that day.

A short while later, in a harsh and loud voice, the British CID chief read out the allegations against me: arresting, detaining and torturing British Malaya's CID officers. Raja Ahmed Hisham was the first person to be called in to confirm these severe charges. It was my turn (not Raja Ahmed Hisham's) to wait for the verdict. What a twist of fate! A minute seemed like an hour as I waited with bated breath for Raja Ahmed Hisham to speak. Then, in his very English accent, Raja Ahmed Hisham announced, "Not true! In fact, if not for Enchik Mustapha's help, my assistants and I would have been beheaded by the Japanese." I let out a long sigh of relief.

Jalaluddin and Hashim Misai also gave similar answers. I felt safe. What could the British CID chief do if his officers would not press the charges he had already prepared on paper? Had one of them testified that I had touched them, even if only with a ruler, I was sure I would have been sent to prison for at least ten years.

In the long interrogation that followed, my answers to the CID chief

did not just defend my own role in World War II, but also that of all KMM members, in and out of detention. I invited the CID chief to search for one shred of evidence of crimes committed by KMM members! And if there was any, I was willing to stick my neck out. But, at the same time, I asked him to investigate KMM's good deeds and gestures in helping civilians, police officers, volunteers and Malay Regiment soldiers and officers.

As I left the CID Chief's office, Raja Ahmed Hisham came to tell me, with the utmost sincerity, "Believe me Enchik Mustapha, I did not add a single word more than what the CID chief already knows about you and KMM." He next thanked me for taking the trouble to return his car, which he later sold for \$3,000. It was this money that had helped him support his family during the Japanese Occupation. I am sure that until today, he thinks his car was taken by the Japanese and not by his captor, Onan Haji Siraj.

Power Struggle within KMM

Something I had anticipated with concern was unfolding right before my eyes. Yes, when the time was ripe, Singapore would be attacked from the air and by ground troops.

Onan and I were summoned to accompany Major Fujiwara to the Japanese Air Force HQ in Kuala Lumpur, where a huge cloth-based map of Singapore lay spread on a table with multi-coloured large-head pins and tiny flags pinned on it. We were asked to mark the locations of the two prisons that held KMM members – the Outram Road Prison and the Changi Prison. A Japanese Air Force Officer explained that in the event of an air attack on Singapore, Japanese pilots would do their level best not to hit the two prisons, but it could not be guaranteed. Should the unfortunate happen, we would have to look for the bodies of our KMM friends in the rubble and identify them from non-flammable items such as gold-capped teeth, rings and belt buckles.

I returned to the KMM House in deep gloom, pondering over the fate of fellow KMM members now residing in 'His Majesty's Palace'. Onan had also arrested more people, each arrest giving me more problems than I needed. A few nights earlier, with the help of the Jalan Campbell Police Station, he had raided a house in Ampang and returned with a captive. But he later somehow forgot about this ill-fated man.

After five days, something drove me to go out with a Police Inspector friend to eat *satay*. My friend mentioned the detainee brought in by Onan. After eating, I went to the lock-up to see the poor man. It was heart

wrenching. The Chinese man had the telltale white ring of 'soap-water treatment' on his lips. His hands gripped and shook the iron bars of the lock-up and my heart may well have been those bars.

I ordered the man released regardless of the wrath to be expected from Onan. But what did the detainee do as soon as he was released? Instead of fleeing for his dear life, he asked for the return of his pen and two tins of kerosene oil confiscated by the Police. I asked for the items to be returned to him. My police officer friend said, "Enchik Mustapha, you can never be a good police officer." This was a most accurate observation. Inspector Abdullah, Inspector Abdul Ghani and Inspector Said Mohammad can testify to this story.

Onan's conduct became more appalling. He was fond of threatening people he deemed pro-British. This made it difficult for me to convince the Malay community at large that the KMM was a noble body with honourable intentions. I had no choice but to tell him off, and this infuriated him to no end. From then on, he was out to get rid of me and replace me as KMM Vice President and interim leader. He craved for my position as he expected KMM President Ibrahim to perish in the impending Japanese bombing of Singapore.

One day, he called for an emergency meeting, suggesting it was time the KMM elected an Acting President, offering himself as candidate. I defended my position by quoting the KMM constitution, which under certain circumstances, allowed the Vice President to take over automatically as President. This man's greed and ambition continued to be apparent throughout the Japanese Occupation. When Ibrahim was appointed Lt Colonel in the Japanese Volunteer Army, Malai Giyu Gun, he had to have a similar rank in another Japanese military set-up. Everything had to be shared between the two.

In another meeting I chaired, we decided to replace Enchik (Mister) with Tuan (Master), and Chik (Miss) with Tun. After the meeting, Japanese officers and soldiers were confused and stunned when we Malays started calling each other Tuan (Master), instead of calling them that. Were they not the Tuans now that the British were gone? We resorted to this trick as things had come to a sad point, where even a Japanese shop assistant expected to be addressed 'Tuan'. They soon learned that the KMM members were not going to let them belittle us.

There were arrested British and Dutch intelligence officers who were brought to the KMM House. I did not allow any form of physical violence; only verbal threats were permissible. If the sound of a cane hitting something was heard, it was actually a cane hitting a rug placed against the back of a chair. At night, the same rug became M.N. Othman's sleep-

ing mat. Despite the pandemonium of war and the confusion of chaotic unrest, he carried on typing and did whatever was necessary for the organisation. Nothing seemed to unnerve him. He was later sent to Tokyo to study Japanese culture and language, but suffered bombing at sea, and was in Tokyo when the atomic bombs devastated Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

British and Dutch intelligence agents were college-trained, but I regret to say, for a mere \$150 per month, they were willing to hunt down pro-Indonesia Malays and anti-Dutch Indonesians in Malaya. During their 'stay' with us, sometimes for a week, we imbibed them with a nationalistic 'Greater Indonesia' spirit. We only released them after an authentic change in attitude and shows of deep regret and remorse.

In 1950, five years after the war ended, I came across one of them in a bus travelling between Kampung Baru and Kuala Lumpur. I did not recognise him until he introduced himself as one of those agents 're-educated' by me in Kuala Lumpur during the Japanese Occupation. He had then become a successful rubber dealer in independent Indonesia. I almost could not believe it when he thanked me profusely for making him see how wrong he was. Luckily, he did not bear a grudge against me.

Another person who expressed his gratitude was CID Officer Hashim Misai, the 'number three' man in the Raja Ahmed Hisham story. After escaping from KMM House, he fled to Johore Baru, and only returned to Kuala Lumpur after the British return. In 1950, when I was running a food stall at the Kuala Lumpur Sunday Market, he disclosed that he was instructed by 'someone senior' to watch over me, to ensure I was not 'in harm's way'. The situation had changed. Before the war, Hashim Misai was to keep tabs on my movements, but now he was to 'keep me safe'.

I knew who the 'senior man' was. He had requested early retirement from the Police Force. He later told me frankly, "Enchik Mustapha, I have lived like a European for far too long. From now on, I am going to live like a Malay", when I called on him at the Orang Besar Jajahan Office (District Chieftain Office) in Teluk Anson in October 1975, thirty years after the war ended. Extremely pleased to see me after so many years, this refined gentleman treated me with warmth and gratitude.

My Attitude

During all my trials and tribulations, I was reminded of a Malay saying, "When two elephants fight, the mouse-deer in the middle dies." I wanted to prevent that. The Cambodians have a similar saying, "If two giants are at war, the ant must stand to the side."

In Ipoh, only Pak Itam Sulaiman had asked the Japanese for some mining land left by the British, but in Kuala Lumpur, many came to ask for things, from a salt-fish monopoly in Kelang to a pineapple monopoly in Banting. They truly tested my patience. I told them, “The war is not over yet. Let us wait and see. After the war, we will talk about it.” As they did not seem to understand, I had to openly tell them, “This victory is not our victory!” Then they understood.

Notes

1. The episode when I saved three Malay officers in the British police force has never before been narrated in full.
2. On page 134 of *F Kikan* by Lt Gen. Fujiwara Iwaichi, he noted that on 11 January 1942 “I began to feel a chill and a sharp headache about the time we reached the outskirts of the capital (Kuala Lumpur).”
3. See Mustapha Hussain (1999: Appendix 8, p. 597, Appendix 9, p. 598, Appendix 10, pp. 599-602). For an English translation of Raja Hisham’s letter, see Appendix 2 (p. 404) and for an English translation of Jalaluddin’s letter, see Appendix 3 (p. 405).
4. Ibrahim Yaakub’s letter, dated 20 May 1975 (p. 11 [iii]), read, “torturing Abdul Rahim Kajai and arresting Raja Ahmed Hisham – I quickly sent a note to release Raja Ahmed Hisham...”
5. Copies of this letter were sent to Prof. Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, Buyung Adil and Prof. Amat Juhari Moain.

Singapore, February 1942: Saving Malay Soldiers and Freeing KMM Members from Prison

In the first week of February 1942, with some F Kikan Officers Onan Haji Siraj left Kuala Lumpur for Singapore ahead of me, to effect the release of KMM members imprisoned in two British jails. However, Onan failed to land in Singapore as hostilities between the Japanese in Johore Baru and the British in Singapore, separated only by the causeway, were both unrelenting and unforgiving.

Johore Baru, 8 February 1942

On 8 February 1942, after passing through Seremban and Melaka, already controlled by the Japanese, I arrived in Johore Baru, the capital of Peninsula Malaya's southernmost state Johore. Many buildings in Johore Baru were in ruins. The once-proud clock tower was riddled with bullets and the facade of the Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque was severely pock-marked.

The British had completed their final withdrawal to Singapore Island by the end of January and the Causeway had been breached. The war for Malaya was over and the siege of Singapore had begun.

From the fabulous tower of the Johore Sultan's Bukit Serene Palace, and enjoying a commanding and almost unhindered view of the partially destroyed Causeway and almost the entire Singapore Island, Gen. T. Yamashita had directed the Japanese onslaught. Yamashita did not guess wrong. No British strategist had suspected he was comfortably housed in the tower of such a magnificent palace.

All shops were shuttered tight; their occupants had bolted for the countryside. KMM youths who had walked hundreds of miles from Kuala Lumpur were already in Johore Baru. One hungry group caught a stray chicken but before they could savour it, they were ordered to cross the Tebrau Straits separating Singapore from mainland Malaya in a simple but effective crossing contraption the Japanese brought with them.

In Johore Baru, deafening and dumbfounding shells and mortar bombs were falling thick and fast all around us. KMM members including myself huddled together with Lt Nakamiya, Captain Saito, 'boy' Yamashita, Ishii and Ohta the barber in trenches inherited from the British. These trenches were either underneath buildings or in the open. I chose the latter to avoid being buried alive under collapsed buildings. In times of war, one seemed to instinctively know how to use one's presence of mind to stay alive. Survival was the basis of every decision. At such times, one quickly learned to use one's brainpower most creatively, to save one's life, both God's most precious gifts to man.

The worst bombardment was on 12 February 1942, the day Japanese forces tried to land en masse on the island. Amidst the most horrendous noise imaginable, I thought of my family in Matang. Were they safe? My wife must be distressed, imagining I was already killed or would be killed. I had left my hometown accompanied by armed Japanese Officers seven weeks earlier with just the clothes on my back; they had heard nothing about me since.

Japanese engineers and sappers were seen forcing the locals to assist them repair the causeway, now dotted with gaping holes and small craters, as a result of the British 'scorched earth' policy. But as the damage was not deep, Japanese sappers merely needed to fill them up with ballasts, which were being carried by the locals in sacks from the nearby railway line. Like bolts of thunder, I heard *kurrah* (come quickly) and *bagero* (stupid) here and there. I must record that women were also coerced into manual labour there.

The Chinese community suffered the most; the Japanese had harboured deep resentment against them since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. That was why almost every Chinese had fled out of Japanese reach. The Indians were relatively favoured by the Japanese.

Datuk Onn Jaafar

I sought Malay leader Datuk Onn Jaafar, who appeared alarmed. When we asked him to join KMM in an effort to clinch Malaya's Independence, he replied, "Just let me be. Yesterday, Datuk Haji Mohd Salleh was slapped about. I am afraid it may be my turn today!" Assuring him not to worry, I gave an 'F' armband with a simple piece of advice, "Datuk, use this when you go to town." He then served me a glass of F&N Orange Crush. Before leaving, I handed an 'F' notice for his house. "Paste this on your door, Datuk. Believe me, no Japanese would dare enter your house!" Datuk Onn acknowledged the receipt of 'F' protection

items from KMM in a book *Datuk Pejuang Kebangsaan* (National Fighter), but for reasons only known to him, he chose to describe them as ‘monkey’s amulets’.

I had taken the trouble to seek out Datuk Onn as I enjoyed reading his incisive and far-sighted articles in the Malay press. His profile as an outstanding Malay leader in *The Straits Times Annual, 1939/1940* had impressed me tremendously. The second time I met Datuk Onn was together with KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub after the capitulation of Singapore. We later recommended that the Japanese employ Datuk Onn as Johore’s Food Controller.

Singapore Landing, 13 February 1942

The Japanese had given their all to seize Singapore and end the war on 11 February 1942, Japan’s National Founding Day for the year 2602, but they were late by four days. Singapore was without question the most bombed and shelled area in the war. Several oil depots including the one on Bukum Island were still burning. The sky was dark with huge columns of thick smoke emitting from oil tanks set ablaze by the British, no longer aimed at retarding Japanese advance but rather to minimise Japanese material gain. Every now and then, tongues of wild flames leaped into the sky like giant fireworks.

I landed in Singapore the night of 13 February 1942. As I set foot on the island, I scooped a handful of soil¹ and made a tearful vow that Singapore would one day return to the lap of its rightful owner, the Malays. Would it?² As we had walked since noon, my legs were in severe pain, but what could I say? Sheer determination propped me up. Japanese rejection of our demand for Independence nagged me but my KMM friends, including my brother Yahaya (an active KMM member in Pahang) were still in British prisons. KMM’s mission would only be accomplished when our friends walked as free men on the streets of Singapore. For the record, they included KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub; Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako); Ahmad Boestamam; Abdul Karim Rashid; Abdullah Kamil; Idris Hakim; Sutan Jenain; Abdul Samad Ahmad and Mohamad Salehuddin.

In Kuala Lumpur I had marked ‘Xs’ on a Japanese map to indicate locations of the two Singapore prisons, but who could be sure of anything anymore? Some stray shells and bombs are more blind than others! I would like to add that in Johore Baru, we took the opportunity to request the Japanese Air Force not to bomb Malay villages and the two prisons in Singapore.

KMM members who arrived in Singapore on the same day I did were Onan Haji Siraj (Perak); Baهران bin Alang Ahmad (Perak); Johar bin Kerong (Selangor); Abdul Kadir Adabi (Kelantan); Wan Daud Ahmad (later Datuk); Ali (Johore); Musa Ahmad (Johore); Mohd Mustafa bin Ali (the Ipoh youth who perceived Fifth Column activities as an exhilarating adventure) and some others who prefer not to be linked to KMM history under Ibrahim Yaakub's leadership. It is their right to remain anonymous, but they should know that KMM was the first effort by an organised Malay political party to regain our homeland from white domination since the fall of Melaka in 1511.

Together with two KMM members and six F Kikan Officers we reached Pasir Panjang Police Station on the south-west of the island at 9.30 pm, 13 February 1942. In the dark of the night, we 'felt' our way with our shoes, just in case there were mines planted on both sides of the road. Major Fujiwara was right in front, groping and leading us. I could not help recalling the horrendous effects of a mine that exploded under a truckload of Japanese soldiers earlier on in Kampar.

That night, the Japanese pressed on with their shelling while the British retaliated in spurts. We learned to identify shells; Japanese shells carried bluish-green light while British ones were reddish in colour. However, whenever Japanese aircraft swooped over Singapore, the British stopped firing until all the planes had left. I guessed this was a measure to avoid Japanese detection of their whereabouts.

We entered a small one-storey wooden building by the road. Although the building was not damaged, windowpanes lay in smithereens on the floor. I leaned against the corner of a tiny room, making sure my bottom was safe from broken glass, and closed my eyes. We did not think of mattresses or pillows; even a mat was not available. Furthermore, nothing much could be done; Major Fujiwara forbade us from putting the lights on. I recalled a night in the Tanjung Malim Rest House where Major Fujiwara placed two Japanese Officers outside my door. Was it to avoid my escape or to safeguard me – the most senior KMM leader not imprisoned and still needed by them?

In the dark and airless night, I thought of my family in Matang. In less than two months, my life had taken on bizarre twists and turns beyond my control. Destiny had flung me bodily into a war on an island 400 miles away from my family. And what did the future hold? In Kuala Lumpur, despite a conflict of interest when I demanded Japanese proclamation of Malaya's Independence, I was still in good stead. Only part of Malaya had been occupied and KMM's help was still needed. What about now? Now that Singapore was almost within Japanese grasp? What would

happen to us? I relegated the 'ifs' and 'if nots' to a far corner of my mind and tried to sleep.

14 February 1942

At the crack of dawn 14 February 1942, I awoke with neither sleep nor rest. I walked over to a nearby building, the Pasir Panjang Police Station's main building, where I was surprised to find photographs of KMM friends Pak Chik Ahmad and Hanif Sulaiman, both from Taiping, on the 'Wanted' notice board. But something was amiss. The descriptions could not be more accurate, but their photos were in the wrong boxes. I slipped this historical document into my pocket but sad to say it was lost in the on-going confusion of war.

Looks like these two men were of greater importance than KMM President Ibrahim Yaakub and me. These two can in fact be likened to Malay patriots Datuk Sagor and Datuk Sri Maharajalela of Perak and Mat Kilau and Datuk Bahaman of Pahang; all of them were wanted by the British colonialists. Descendants of Pak Chik Ahmad and Hanif Sulaiman should take pride. These two nationalists had dabbled in a variety of cultural and social organisations until they found KMM, a body that promoted their life-long aspirations to liberate Malaya from Western domination.

On the same day, I was taken by F Kikan to the warfront near Pasir Panjang. It was drizzling, but Japanese soldiers loved it. Looking much like birds with broken wings, with the drizzle acting as lubricants, they used their left hands to propel themselves forward on the ground. In that manner, they slithered with great ease and speed.

Grass on both sides of the road had been blackened by soot from all kinds of fire. Cows once brown were now greyish-black, but they kept cropping grass, oblivious to the intense war.

I encountered several groups of mostly Muslim war refugees. Chinese living in the area, busy digging trenches, were in possession of at least thirty sacks of rice and other food. I was devastated to see children crying of fear and hunger, and the refugees appealed to me for help. So I ordered the Chinese to hand over a sack of rice and some biscuits to the refugees. After that I instructed the refugees to go to a nearby fruit orchard where sour sops, papayas and bananas were not only plentiful but ripe.

Death Trap for Malay Regiment Soldiers

We pushed ahead amidst an occasional hail of bullets and shells. On the ground were tangles of snapped telephone wires, fallen telegraph poles,

burning vehicles, holes and craters. Everything looked deserted and in complete shambles. Here and there, Japanese forces were slithering, crawling, shooting and moving under orders.

I am a pacifist who had buried my pet bird with recitations of Qur'anic verses. I had no interest in things military. I kept entering and leaving the FMS Volunteer Force. Now, against all my intentions, I was right smack in the middle of an arena where two warring parties were shooting and killing each other!

This was the day I witnessed a horrifying incident that will remain etched in my memory for as long as I live. I was summoned by a Japanese and four Indian Independence League (IIL) members, including Hamzah A. Cunard, to a certain wooded area. There, in front of me were two platoons of Malay soldiers and Volunteers in an irreversible death trap. Four of them were already strapped to rubber trees for, I guessed, bayonet target practice. One of the Japanese had in fact 'flicked' at a target.

Amidst the grim spectacle, an unhurt Japanese Sergeant was jumping up and down, stomping his feet, shouting, and crying, all at the same time. In a hysteria of rage, he was ready to do something devastating. No one dared to calm him down. I decided to act on impulse. I began to shout as loudly as the hysterical Sergeant, and this shocked him. He came around and began to take notice of his surroundings.

When asked, in a gush of words between sobs, he recounted what had happened. According to an F Kikan interpreter, the Sergeant accused the Malay Regiment of not observing war ethics. These captured Malay Regiment soldiers, under a Malay Second Lieutenant, had raised a white flag. But when the Japanese troops merrily climbed up a slope to relieve them of their weapons, the Malay Second Lieutenant ordered the Malay soldiers to spray the Japanese with fire from two machine guns and forty rifles. As a consequence, a Japanese Captain and many soldiers lost their lives. The Japanese Sergeant insisted, "This is unforgivable!"

A petrified Malay soldier confirmed the story but explained they shot strictly under orders of the Malay Second Lieutenant, who had vanished. Sergeant Major Mohd Noor, the most senior in the group, was left to take the brunt. To calm the furious Japanese Sergeant, I expressed my deepest sympathy and apologised to him and his men. I reasoned that the Malay soldiers were not responsible for their actions as they were merely following orders of a superior who absconded. After he calmed down slightly, I appealed to his mercy that the forty-eight or so Malay soldiers be released to me. After much discussion, he agreed on one condition, that I bring back the Malay Second Lieutenant who had fled, to face the Japanese. The 48 soldiers under Sergeant Major Mohd Noor were taken

to our base near the Pasir Panjang Police Station and asked to clean the place up and prepare a dinner of rice and dried anchovies.

I did not keep my promise to the Japanese Sergeant. Singapore fell shortly thereafter. I had no intention of looking for the Second Lieutenant even though I knew who he was. This man, also from my home state of Perak, later hid in the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper office, borrowed civilian clothes from my cousin, Yusof Ishak (Editor of the daily and later the first President of Singapore) and left quietly for home. He returned to his soldiering profession and retired as a very senior officer. Now (in 1976), he is alive and well. I am ashamed of this one man's conduct. In truth, Malay officers and soldiers were the ones who fought most courageously to their last weapon. So courageous were they that the Japanese commented to me, "Malay soldiers are fighting as if the British were their father!"

15 February 1942: Saving 18 Malay Soldiers from Beheading

Eighteen Malay soldiers, the most senior of whom was Sergeant Shaari bin Muhammad, Regimental No. 272, lost contact with the rest of their colleagues. Japanese fighting men found them in some undergrowth. A Japanese was about to behead Sergeant Shaari when young KMM member Zainal Abidin Kassim encountered them. Not knowing a word of Japanese, plucky Zainal Abidin drew the attention of the Japanese to his 'F' armband.

This singular act and presence of mind saved the lives of those Malay soldiers. I cannot think of a braver act than this. According to Sergeant Shaari, Zainal Abidin went down on his knees to beg for the release of these Malay soldiers. Later, when the soldiers were presented to me, I assured them, "You are now safe with me. Stay here." Zainal Abidin (now, in 1976, director of Aneka Teknik Utama Sdn Bhd) was then assigned the job of looking after them.

Later, I asked the soldiers to prepare for an important operation, which was to assist KMM members under my leadership to break down the heavy doors of the Changi Prison and liberate our KMM friends. At that point in time, I did not know that prisoners have already been released by the British a day or so earlier. Since the British surrendered the same day, plans to break down Changi's door were called off.

From the two incidents involving Sergeant Major Mohd Noor and Sergeant Shaari, I experienced a deep sense of fulfilment. I told myself, "Looks like KMM has begun to play its role as the saviour of Malays who have all this while been oppressed by the British colonialists." I felt

my spirit soaring higher. KMM was for the people! Thirty years later, in my effort to gather material for my memoirs, I sought Sergeant Shaari at his small sundry store in Kampung Baru, Tanjung Malim. As soon as he recognised me, in front of half a dozen people he gave me a tight bear hug and sobbed on my shoulders. He had vowed to do so if he were ever to meet me again after the war. I was both touched by this sincere and emotional display of gratitude.³

British Surrender

At about 2.30 pm the same afternoon, I began to hear whisperings among F Kikan members that the British would surrender unconditionally. I waited patiently for this event, significant to me as a colonised people. But then, what next? A new regime would take over and conflicts would persist for several years. And after that, no one can tell! World War I only took four years but I have read about the Hundred Year War. While deep in my thoughts, the sound of shelling and firing suddenly stopped. I never knew how beautiful silence could be!

At about 5.00 pm, I saw Japanese soldiers in the vicinity excitedly looking up at the sky. There, a white oval-shaped balloon floated with a huge bunting. A Japanese shouted to me, "There, the enemy has surrendered!" I noticed the balloon went up from an area still controlled by the British. Next I heard the Japanese soldiers shouting at the top of their lungs, "*Banzai, Banzai, Banzai.*" F Kikan members shouted "We have won!" joyously. About an hour later, I was fortunate to witness a two-seater Ford V8 just several yards away from where I stood. Driven by a British soldier, it carried a British Officer wearing a cap with a red band. In his hand was a white flag as huge as a door. The vehicle moved slowly and carefully. I felt a mix of emotions; there was some sadness.

I was a Malay privileged to witness a moment of humiliation that befell a world power whose slogans 'Brittania Rules the Waves' and 'The Empire Where the Sun Never Sets' had reverberated the world over. This power, once perceived impregnable and invincible, has bowed its head to an Asian race. This was the moment of destruction for the British Empire. There would be less red patches marking British Empire territories on world maps. It also marked the end of Western domination of my motherland *Tanah Melayu* (The Malay Land) that had gone unbroken for 431 long years since the 1511 Portuguese landing in Melaka. After almost four and a half centuries, this Malay Land was finally free of Western grip. Britain did not, for a moment, expect an Asian military to successfully cleave through dense tropical jungle and advance 650

miles from Singora to Singapore in 70 days. Power with speed! Speed with power!

While Japanese soldiers were jubilantly throwing their *boshis* into the air and hugging each other, all inhibitions thrown to the wind, I went to see the Malay soldiers under KMM's care. Seeing they were all right, I promised to get them released. I looked for Major Fujiwara. This smiling, cool and calm Japanese Officer had not turned down any of my requests, including difficult ones (for him and the Japanese Imperial Army), such as the release of CID Officers who openly admitted to arresting Japanese citizens, some of whom were now serving the F Kikan and the Japanese Military Police (Kempeitai). Fujiwara had also not acted against me for exposing to Lt Gen. Itagaki the revolting conduct of Japanese soldiers in Ipoh.

But today, the day of sweet victory and mass jubilation, when I asked him to release the Malay soldiers in our care, he was touchy. He said, "Now, this matter is one that can only be handled by the High Command. I cannot do much any more." He pointed out that many Japanese soldiers were killed at the hand of the Malay Regiment soldiers who "fought to the last bullet as if the British were their father!"

It was true. When Japanese soldiers landed in Singapore, the men who fought them to the death were Malay soldiers ordered to be rear guard defence to ensure safe British retreat. (The British could no longer trust Indian soldiers after Captain Mohan Singh and his followers became turncoats in North Malaya.) It has been recorded that on 13 February, the First Battalion of the Malay Regiment ferociously and stubbornly battled the Japanese for 48 hours. A Japanese Lieutenant added fuel to the fire when he reported an incident in Bukit Chandu. "We threatened to pour petrol and set ablaze the undergrowth around a group of Malay soldiers but they were stubborn until we were able to kill their leader." Looking back, I think he was talking about valiant Lt Adnan, whose bravery is well recognised.

But I remained firm and kept insisting that they release Malay soldiers into our care. I told Major Fujiwara, "You allow it or not, you like it or not, I will let them go. They are borderline cases and should receive due consideration. Furthermore, they fought under orders. You are a soldier, you should know what orders are!"

At the end of the argument, the first we ever had, once again Fujiwara agreed to my request, although this time, his consent came only after my appeal was supported by his private secretary and by Chief Interpreter Otaguro, for whom Fujiwara had great respect. This proved, yet again, Major Fujiwara was a gentle, considerate and humane person. (For the

record, warm-hearted Otaguro, who understood the Malays well, was killed together with IIL Leader Pritam Singh in a plane crash en route to Japan just weeks after the capitulation of Singapore.)

An Unforgettable Experience

15 February was a date I would never forget till my dying breath. It was the longest day in my life. That night I wondered how Malay soldiers in my care could sleep so soundly. Some even snored. It seemed so easy for them to place absolute trust in me. They had just missed death by a hair's breadth hours earlier. It must have either been the sleep of exhaustion, or relief, or both.

Before that, over a dinner of rice and fried anchovies, they were greatly interested to know where I learned all about warfare. In Japan? I told them I had not been to Japan and my involvement in the war was pure destiny. I had not at any point in time ever thought that my life would move that way, which was to advance with the Japanese in a full-blown war, just because I was elected Vice President of KMM, a Malay political party striving for Independence! I did not get any war training whatsoever; what I did or did not do was simply out of a need to stay alive.

On the contrary, as hard as I tried, sleep would not come. It was too eventful a night for me. It was a night of a thousand impending changes, to be engineered by a small race, the contention of superpowers of the time. Strange but true, even crickets fell silent that night. In fact all insects stopped carolling. Did they know that major changes were about to begin that night? As we know it, God endowed them with highly sensitive instincts.

I could not sleep as many Japanese operettas were playing in my head: Taiwan and its Nipponisation; the defeat of the Tsars; Port Arthur and the supplanting of Nippon culture in Korea. The movie *Strange As It May Seem* had demonstrated how the Japanese authorities had conveniently killed all their Fifth Columnists soon after occupying Manchuria. Now what would happen to KMM members, and I who participated in the Greater East Asia War? Would we also become victims of Japanese aggression? What should I do to save all of us? You will find that I later acted outside the KMM President's knowledge. If Ibrahim Yaakub had ensnared KMM members through his collusion with the Japanese, let me as Vice President disentangle the web.

After the 1937 China incident, I saw gory newspaper photographs of Japanese beheadings with samurai swords, a barbaric 16th century practice. Had Ibrahim Yaakub, as Editor of *Majlis* newspaper, not read about

Far East political developments and the massacre of a quarter million Chinese? These events should have cautioned him in his choice of a partner for KMM, a Malay body formed along the lines of the Young Turks movement.

Now, I was seeing brutality that I had only seen in photographs. Two severed heads were displayed in Taiping, two along Kelang Bridge and four on barrels along Batu Road in Kuala Lumpur. How many in Singapore? Had Ibrahim not envisioned these Japanese operettas now playing in my head? Or was money his only consideration when he played the role of a spy to a power desirous of expanding its sphere of influence?

At about 4.00 am hundreds of trucks were heard rumbling towards the Malay Peninsula, heading north into Thailand and Burma. To the Japanese, their mission was not yet accomplished. They had a huge appetite! I was lucky they did not haul me but I knew an IIL member who was taken to Burma and then to the Andamans. It was most fortunate that no KMM member was dragged to Burma because going to war was indeed not one of KMM's aspirations.

After Malay soldiers in my care were released, some left like a shot, others stayed on for the night. Some I sent to the causeway the next morning. Those who crossed at the causeway may have had to contribute their energy to repair activities, but what was a little work now that they were free from being punished or detained as Prisoners of War (POW)?

British Surrender Ceremony

Japanese Officers looked high and low for me to represent KMM at the unconditional surrender, but it was not my fortune. However, with God's grace, KMM member Johar bin Kerong was the privileged Malay to have represented KAME at the historical signing ceremony. Johar was given a *boshi* adorned with a yellow star, a khaki tunic, breeches, boots, yellow puttees and a leather belt complete with a holster but no pistol. Fair-skinned Johar appeared almost like a Japanese except for a full growth of beard, a result of many weeks of being on the move. When I saw him later, he appeared more formidable than a Japanese Sergeant from Kyushu.

Taken to the ceremony by a Japanese Officer (not from F Kikan), he was made to stand very far from the negotiating table where several generals from the two forces sat opposite each other. Johar made history. He was the luckiest KMM member, witnessing the surrender of a major power to an Asian race bold enough to declare war on a Western nation renowned for its immense power and impregnable might.

Johar claimed to have seen a strange bundle, like a shrouded dead man, under a mosquito net. I did not initially believe Johar's story, but he was my student and he did not know how to lie. I then remembered reading a book where a stupid and useless soldier was finally made candidate for the 'Tomb of the Unknown Soldier'. Is there a grave of an unknown Japanese soldier in Singapore now? If there is, the 'occupant' is none other than the bundled one seen by KMM Fifth Columnist Johar bin Kerong.⁴

I would like to add an interesting story about Johar. After the momentous ceremony, Johar was hardly out of his power uniform, but no one dared cross his path, not even Ibrahim and Onan. Johar was fond of travelling into the city, sitting proudly in an 8-cylinder Chevrolet like a Japanese Master, with Hamzah Tajuddin as his driver.

One night, while I was talking with other KMM members on the future of the Malays under the new Far East fascist coloniser, three F Kikan Japanese members came to KMM House pretending to look for something. I got up to ask. After much hesitation, they disclosed that they were looking for two KMM members whose car had knocked down two Japanese soldiers on a motorcycle, causing serious injury to one of them.

I had to think fast. I lied to the Japanese that I had sent the two members home as I myself did not approve of their behaviour. "They have become naughty", I told them. A Japanese responded, "It is all right to be naughty, but it is wrong to hit and run. It is not humane and the two should be taught a lesson." They left after I promised to personally "teach the two a lesson." Shortly after, I sent the two KMM members home to Selangor.

According to Johar, it was the motorcycle that collided into his car. But I think neither Big Boss Johar's driver nor the motorcyclist had a licence. Both parties were at fault. One of the motorcyclists was apparently flung under a lorry. The other not too badly hurt Japanese got up in a hurry and in great pain apologised profusely to Master Johar in his impressive uniform. After as smart a salute as he could muster, the Japanese soldier told Johar to "Please get on with whatever you were doing and never mind us."

KMM House and F Kikan Headquarters

On the morning of 16 February, I was taken by F Kikan Officers to Jalan Malcolm where they had commandeered three two-storey British Quarters already converted into barracks for billeting soldiers during the war. Foodstuff – such as rice, anchovy, salt, chilli and canned sardines – were

brought with us. Some things found in the house chosen as KMM House indicated that it once belonged to a European Doctor.

If I am not wrong, the next day,⁵ I was summoned by Lt Nakamiya and another Officer to visit several collecting centres for British, Indian and Gurkha soldiers. These detainees were sitting among some *lalang* (a type of tall coarse grass) with nothing above their heads. Some had just arrived from Scotland and had no chance to fight a tropical warfare that they were hardly trained for. A British Officer came over to Lt Nakamiya to request tents as they had been exposed to the sun and rain for two days. He was afraid his men would get sick. Lt Nakamiya replied nonchalantly, "We have a great many tents," turned around and left. In the almost seven weeks moving with the Japanese, I had not seen a single Japanese tent.

Freedom for About 150 Imprisoned KMM Members

I heard that approximately 150 KMM members imprisoned by the British since the first week of December had already been released and were in fairly good shape. Most prisoners had been set free a couple of days before the capitulation of Singapore when the British were no longer able to guarantee their safety at 'the King George's Palace'. One KMM group, including KMM President Ibrahim sought refuge at the *Warta Malaya* newspaper office along Cecil Street. Others sought safety at the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper office, at the Sultan Mosque and in Malay *kampungs* all over the island. Some stuck to Ishak Haji Muhammad like hungry leeches as Singapore was alien to them. Imagine these bewildered small-town members released into a war-torn alien city! A Malay gangster 'Mat Spring' told the freed detainees that the British had planted a time bomb in the prison, but he and his group had defused it. I doubt the truth of the story.

I was beginning to worry about my brother Yahaya. No fellow-prisoners had seen him after the release. Days later, I found him hiding at the Bukit Chermin Siamese Temple. I could hardly recognise him with his full growth of beard and his clothes covered with red earth from Japanese shelling.

Amid the clamour and din, KMM members who came with me from Peninsula Malaya, including Onan, gathered several trucks to carry these newly released members from their hiding places to two buildings near KMM House. After that, we had to calm down these angry and restless souls, some holding enamel plates, mugs and blankets, souvenirs from His Majesty's Prison. It was no easy task. They had just been freed from

an almost fatal situation, death at the British hands or death due to Japanese bombs. Small quarrels broke out and we had to take appropriate actions in dealing with them. They had left the prison with many hopes and aspirations. Some merely wanted to return home; some asked for compensations and rewards; many wanted to know when they could take revenge on the British; yet there were some who pondered hard about the ‘newcomers’!

Sutan Jenain volunteered to be Chief Cook at KMM House with several Volunteer Officers and Ramli Haji Tahir as assistants. There was only one toilet for dozens of occupants in the house and everyone had to pass in front of Sutan Jenain’s room to get to the toilet. This was where the old man took advantage of the situation to preach socialist ideas to a bourgeois group of Malays, which included magistrates, doctors, education officers and journalists. In this manner, many a young Malay passed through Sutan Jenain’s ‘dyeing plant’.

Congregation of KMM Ex-Detainees

On 17 February, at a mass gathering of KMM ex-detainees I transferred my authority as KMM leader to Ibrahim, but offered my assistance whenever needed. He then gave a speech appropriate for a gathering of restless ex-detainees. Among the audience were Malay Officers and Volunteers, including Captain Dr Abbas and Captain Salleh who were taking refuge under KMM’s umbrella. These Malay Officers had not been harassed by the Japanese as I had lied that they were also KMM members.

Then, Sutan put forward a most appropriate question, “Now that you are captain of the ship, Ibrahim, where are you taking these KMM members?” I don’t remember Ibrahim’s answer. As Ibrahim got carried away into food and toilet rules, like his student days at the SITC, I wrote a short note on a piece of paper asking him to conclude the meeting for fear a bomb may be planted under the stairs. I had encountered this problem in Ipoh, and everyone left.

It was at this congregation that I openly voiced my doubts about Japanese sincerity. “Japan’s victory is not our own. Our struggle has still a long way to go.”⁶ My apprehension has been recorded by one of Malaya’s greatest orator and politician Ahmad Boestamam, in an unpublished thesis by Abdul Malik Hanafiah. Boestamam had said, “Although Mustapha had done all he could to save lives, chastity and property of the Malays during the early Japanese Occupation and had saved the lives of KMM leaders imprisoned in Changi and Outram Road prisons, when Ibrahim and his clique took over the responsibility, Mustapha as Vice President

was ignored. This happened because Mustapha had voiced his suspicion over Japanese promises at KMM's first meeting after KMM members were released from prison."

Saving Sergeant Harun

The next day⁷ several KMM members and I were roaming the streets of Singapore in search of Malay soldiers and volunteers who needed help. At the Buona Vista Road battlefield, we saw many dead bodies, some on top of each other, some strewn all over the place. What a nauseating sight! In one corner we happened to chance across a Malay soldier with dried blood caking his uniform trying to get up. It was a most pathetic scene. He looked like a walking corpse. We rushed towards him and carried him to a Malay village nearby where we asked a Javanese man, Wak Tahir Karman, to do his best to save the soldier.

The soldier, Sergeant Harun bin Haji Musa (Regimental Number 588), is now living in Batu 9, Trong, near Taiping, Perak. According to him, when war broke out on 8 December 1941, he was a Corporal deployed at Air Rajah Road Camp in Singapore in the First Company with Captain J.T. Horsburgh as his Company Commander and Lt Nordin from Changkat Jering, Perak as Platoon Commander.

Sergeant Harun was on duty at the Gap House Camp in Buona Vista Road which was surrounded by a forest reserve. When the Japanese infiltrated his post, hostilities broke out with rifles, machine guns, tommy guns and hand grenades. Captain Horsburgh was shot and fell down next to him. So did Private Ismail from Batu 20, Perak and Company 'A' Orderly Zakaria @ Mat bin Abu Bakar. Sergeant Harun was also shot and when he lay unconscious, he was bayoneted several times and left for dead. It was perhaps three days before he regained consciousness at about the time we chanced upon him. Later, I went to see Sergeant Harun at Wak Tahir's house where I gave him and his wife a pass to return to their home in Perak by train. Still in pain, his wife helped him on to the goods train that took them safely home.

More on the War's Tumultuous Aftermath in Singapore

One day, while I was listening to Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) deliver a public speech to a group of Singapore citizens torn asunder by war, I noticed a boy selling food that was almost covered by giant blue bottles. As I was deep in my thoughts about health hazards now faced by the people, a man slapped my shoulder in a non-hostile manner. Startled,

I grabbed my automatic pistol which I carried at all times. I had to be on the alert for enemies left behind by the British, especially Nationalist Chinese.

The man turned out to be Chikgu (teacher) Abu Samah, a Malay Regiment Education Officer I knew well as I used to stop over at his home whenever I travelled to Melaka or Port Dickson. He said nothing but motioned me to follow him quietly, and I did. Some distance later, we arrived at Istana Kampung Gelam (a royal residence), and once inside, Abu Samah lamented, "See how sad their situation is!"

It was indeed pathetic. Some Malay soldiers and hundreds of members of families of soldiers were crammed in the building with no proper change of clothes, no proper food and hardly any money as they had not been paid for almost three months since the invasion. These soldiers and families were all from Peninsula Malaya. Some women, whether they knew it or not, had lost their husbands.

Feeling sorry beyond words, I arranged for four sacks of rice and some anchovies from the *Warta Malaya* newspaper office to be sent to the overcrowded shelter. I also handed over \$1,000, the entire balance of money I had received from the Japanese in Ipoh, to Chikgu Abu Samah. (From Kuala Lumpur onwards, I did sign receipts for money received from the Japanese but the money was 'taken away' from me by Onan. I was not afraid of him, but to avoid a crisis within KMM, I let it be.)

The next day, I took Ibrahim to the Istana for a closer look at what war did to our people, the Malays. There, Ibrahim delivered a speech and I must congratulate him for his concern. I kept going to the palace to check on the progress of these war victims. I would like to note here that these 300 or so victims were later sent home, some as far as Seremban, in trucks and trains provided by the Japanese. Helping me were Chikgu Abu Samah and Tengku (of royal descent) Hussein, the owner of Istana Kampung Gelam.

When the British returned to power in September 1945, I was imprisoned for almost a year in the Batu Gajah Prison. Deeply troubled, Chikgu Abu Samah took the initiative to send a letter to the Chief of the British Field Security Service (FSS) in Perak and the British Malay Regiment Chief in Port Dickson narrating the predicaments faced by the families of Malay soldiers stranded in Singapore during the war. Among other things, he wrote:

...I, Abu Samah, Malay Regiment Education Officer, would like to bring to your attention that after the capitulation of Singapore, I had hundreds of families of Malay soldiers and the soldiers themselves in my care. We had not been paid for two months and had no money in hand. Many Malay leaders promised to help but only Enchik Mustapha Hussain gave us money, rice and

other food, which enabled us to survive at the Istana Kampung Gelam until he (Enchik Mustapha) was able to arrange for us to return to our homes in Peninsula Malaya. We are highly indebted to him for his invaluable services.

P/S: Enchik Mustapha is now detained in Batu Gajah Prison.

After my release, I shed many tears as I read a copy of Chikgu Abu Samah's letter sent to my father. Of the hundreds I have helped, only one was brave enough to write to the British authorities to speak the truth. I am sorry to have lost this invaluable document for it contributed to my conditional release from prison before being re-arrested and brought to Kuala Lumpur for another round of interrogations. I did not know of this letter at the time but I remember that as I was walking out of the prison, the FSS Officer looked at me with less hatred in his blue eyes. He had apparently received a copy of Chikgu Abu Samah's letter.

Istana Kampung Gelam

KMM member Chikgu Junid and I found many clothes (especially of little girls) and hundreds of garden tools, bags of seeds and fertilisers in the Jalan Malcolm house now converted as KMM House. Chikgu Junid and I hauled the clothes to Istana Kampung Gelam for distribution to the children of Malay soldiers taking shelter there. Kind Tengku Hussein continued to receive Malay soldiers and officers into his palace. One of them, now Lt Col Taib bin Jais, former ADC to the King of Malaysia, related his bitter experience in Singapore in an article entitled 'Lt Taib Returned from the Warfront' in *Berita Harian*, 28 July 1977:

After sustaining injuries to his leg, Lt Taib hobbled to Istana Kampung Gelam where many soldiers and Officers were taking shelter. Some hurt, others looked lifeless. Several doctors were seen treating the injured. It goes without saying that they have all discarded their uniforms. Lt Taib was also treated. It was only then he realised how painful his injury was. No more sounds of shelling in Singapore. Only silence and sadness. A few days later, Lt Taib caught a glimpse of a man he had met while camping in Port Dickson, Mustapha Hussain.

"You want to return home?" Mustapha asked.

Lt Taib nodded his head enthusiastically. He knew Mustapha could help as Mustapha was a KMM member. Mustapha wrote a short note for Lt Taib.

Armed with the note, Lt Taib went to the (Singapore) Railway Station. That letter was worth its weight in gold. Two Japanese soldiers guarding the station's main gate let Lt Taib pass through after reading the letter.

Notes

1. *Daughter Insun's note:* My father kept this palmful of Singapore soil in a cigarette tin for 45 years till his death in 1987. My mother unwittingly threw it away after his death.

2. Singapore slipped from our hands.
3. Sergeant Shaari's statement recorded not only his own narrow escape, but also the position of the soldiers under Sergeant Major Mohd Noor who was billeted in a nearby building (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 11, p. 603).
Translator's note: In 1988, I interviewed Sergeant Shaari on tape at his home. He was initially calm, but as soon as he recalled the steel-cold samurai sword perched on his neck, he broke down sobbing. He said he would have been killed a moment later.
4. Narrated in an appendix to my Malay language memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 24, pp. 637-46).
5. Times and dates of events in the war cannot be stated in exact terms. Everything happened so fast and in such chaos.
6. These are my words, and not Ibrahim Yaakub's, as he claims on page 96 of *Sedjarah*, by I.K. Agastya.
7. I think this is the date. Please see Mustapha Hussain (1999: Appendix 12, pp. 605-12). Also article 'Bravery that Must be Appreciated' in *Mingguan Bumi* 13 August 1983.

Saving More Lives: Courageous Fighting Malay Men

KMM members were given several orders by the Japanese, of which I distinctly remember two. The first was to hold public gatherings to advise frightened Singapore citizens to be calm and to obey orders set out by the new Japanese Military Administration. This task naturally fell on Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako), a most gifted orator, who spoke with great ease and fluency in front of hundreds of people.

Second, KMM members were to inform Malay soldiers and volunteers to report to Farrer Park, at a double-storey building within a fenced compound near the Singapore Racecourse. I knew hundreds of Malay soldiers and volunteers were hiding in several *kampungs*, Istana Kampung Gelam, Sultan's Mosque, the Warta Malaya Press office and in other places all over the island. The injured and sick were attended to by their colleagues. One very big group of 28 soldiers was difficult to feed, but two mugs of rice that I boiled with several 'coconut hearts' helped to satisfy their hunger.

When I heard the second order, my heart missed a beat. Something was amiss. I knew the Japanese were clamouring for revenge against Malay soldiers and volunteers who fought stubbornly to the end, killing many a Japanese. Should they assemble at Farrer Park, anything could happen. If they were not killed, they might be detained as Prisoners of War (POWs).

I countermanded this Japanese order by asking KMM members loyal to me to go out and warn soldiers and volunteers not to report at Farrer Park. They must remain in hiding wherever they were until my further orders. So, KMM members Johar bin Kerong, Baهران bin Alang Ahmad, Mohd Rais bin Abdul Karim, Ali bin Ahmad and many others whose names I cannot recall, roamed the island, passing on my message. Several officers, including (now Major) Ibrahim Alla Ditta, MC and Volunteer Capt. Salleh bin Sulaiman helped do the same. (Major Ibrahim Alla Ditta,

my brother-in-law Major Ismail Tahar and Sgt Johan Kidam had a few days earlier sought me for shelter at KMM House.)

While roaming the island, KMM members came across Capt. Dr Abbas bin Haji Alias (who had treated me in the Malay Hospital just before the Japanese Invasion of Malaya); Capt. Salleh bin Sulaiman (my magistrate friend from Tapah); Capt. Tunku (now Tan Sri) Muhammad bin Tunku Besar Burhanuddin (a Negeri Sembilan member of royalty now President of the Malaysian Red Crescent Society); Capt. Mohd Ali bin Mohamed (now Datuk Kurnia Wira Di Raja, Pahang) and others. They were brought back to KMM House for protection. The Japanese did not bother them as I had lied that these Volunteer officers were also KMM members. They were well treated, given food and later assisted to return home with passes from me. Some were even armed with a Japanese document to help them regain their former jobs or secure new ones under the newly installed Japanese Military Administration.

We did our best in the short time we had to warn soldiers and Volunteers. As a result, only about 400 of them, instead of over a thousand, reported at Farrer Park. Therefore, many lives, especially those of officers, were saved from a most tragic disaster, which I will write about later.

KMM's Role in Saving the Farrer Park Detainees

In the uncertainty of chaos, about 400 Malay soldiers, officers and Volunteers congregated at Farrer Park, including Volunteer Capt. Raja Aman Shah and Malay Regiment Lt Ariffin bin Haji Sulaiman. (Only a handful of Malays were officers in the Malay Regiment.) KMM was alarmed when we heard whispers that these soldiers and Volunteers might be killed en masse for having fought so bravely with the British. KMM called for an emergency meeting and a delegation was sent to the Japanese High Command to request an unconditional release of all our fighting men. Our excuse was that they "fought under orders and strict supervision of British officers." Their release, we reasoned, would symbolise "Japanese appreciation of KMM's assistance in the 'Asia for the Asians' War."

As a result, the Japanese agreed not to kill the men, but to detain them as POWs for an uncertain period of time. Unhappy with this outcome, we went to see the Japanese High Command again. This time we were more successful. The Japanese promised to consider releasing the men on one condition: a team of Japanese Military Political Bureau officers would be sent to 'fathom their hearts and minds'. Thank God, no one would be killed without being given a chance; I comforted myself with this latest promise.

Visiting Farrer Park

One day, together with Ibrahim Yaakub and several Japanese officers, I went to Farrer Park, already heavily secured by sentry guards. Chinese and Eurasian Volunteers were detained on the ground floor of a building while Malay Regiment soldiers and officers, as well as Malay Volunteer officers, were kept upstairs. Not a single regular Volunteer was around. Most chose to discontinue fighting when given a choice earlier on; it was only natural to want to return home. Upstairs, hundreds of Malay soldiers, mostly sitting on the floor, surrounded a handful of Malay officers. I recognised three Malay Regiment officers: Lt Ariffin bin Haji Sulaiman, Lt Ibrahim bin Sidek (both from my hometown Matang), and Lt Abdul Wahid bin Judin. These were three of the few commissioned Malay officers in the Malay Regiment. There were also three Volunteer officers I knew in the room: Capt. Raja Aman Shah, a District Officer in Port Dickson; Capt. Yazid bin Ahmad, a senior staff at the Sultan Idris Training College in Tanjung Malim and Lt Datuk Naning from Melaka.

It was with great reluctance that I visited Farrer Park as I knew I would be seeing some of my friends who would naturally accuse me of being a Japanese quisling. When we arrived upstairs, Ibrahim and the Japanese walked towards the Malay Regiment officers, but I went to talk to Capt. Raja Aman Shah, who was with Capt. Yazid and Lt Datuk Naning. Watched by hundreds of regular soldiers, we exchanged courteous enquiries of “*Apa khabar?*” (How are you?). Before I go any further, let me quote an excerpt on Capt. Raja Aman Shah from Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard’s article ‘A Paragon of Loyalty’, in *The New Straits Times*, 28 February 1967:

When the FMS (Federated Malay States) and Straits Settlement Volunteer Forces were mobilised on December 1, 1941, Capt. Raja Aman Shah could have remained at his post in Port Dickson (where he was District Officer) but he immediately applied to be released for military service.... Later, in Port Dickson on January 10, 1942 where all members of the FMS Volunteer Force who had retired in the face of military enemy pressure... were given an option of either returning home or moving south to Malacca and Singapore. Many Volunteers chose to be released, but Capt. Raja Aman Shah placed loyalty to his unit above personal considerations and he remained with the reduced force of two Volunteer companies.

In the month which followed Capt. Raja Aman Shah assisted in the defence of South Johore and later held a section of the Singapore coastal defence line near Changi.... When the final Japanese assault was launched on the morning of February 15, 1942, the FMS Volunteers had been allotted a front line position near MacPherson Road. Major Cockman, the Company Commander was killed in action and Capt. Raja Aman Shah took part in hand-to-hand fighting. When

the enemy was sighted he took a rifle from a wounded NCO and fired it coolly until his trench was overrun.

He was seen to dodge several attempts to bayonet him, and how he escaped death in that desperate encounter is not known. Twenty four hours later he made contact with a number of officers and men of the Malay Regiment and of the Malacca Volunteers at Farrer Park and there he was detained....

During my Farrer Park visit, I decided to say what I had to say to Capt. Raja Aman Shah in view of his seniority and intelligent demeanour. I informed him of the impending 'hearts and minds' investigations by a team of Japanese officers, which would undoubtedly revolve around the question of loyalty and attitude towards the new regime. When I told him this, I caught a glimmer of hope in his eyes. Capt. Raja Aman Shah listened attentively to my advice on how to answer questions posed by the Japanese. It must be done with great care because the Japanese harboured deep vengeance against Malay fighting men and were extremely touchy. He nodded his head with a deep sense of responsibility and in all seriousness.

Trying to Save the Courageous Captain Raja Aman Shah¹

As Capt. Raja Aman Shah was a friend whom I knew the Japanese wanted very much to 'meet', as he had fought valiantly to the last weapon, I took this opportunity to whisper to him my plan to help him escape the next night. I told him I would come and get him out on the quiet. But without a second thought, he refused my offer outright, unless everyone with him would also be freed. I explained that it was my plan to help some prisoners escape, but to help all of them escape was impossible. He still declined my offer and said he didn't have the heart to leave the others. Perhaps, he also had no inkling that he, personally, was very high on the Japanese wanted list. I tried to coax him by telling him that many of his friends were already home with their families, but he maintained his position. He again pleaded that I help all of them. I could only promise to do what I could but I insisted, "You must get out first!" He replied firmly, "I will only leave this place with my friends." He was indeed a very brave man.

What could I do? Ibrahim was already shouting at me to leave the building with him after he and Lt Ariffin had a heated exchange of words. Just as I was about to leave, Capt. Raja Aman Shah grabbed my hand to tell me that the men were all hungry. Keeping my promise, two hours later, I sent two huge crates of canned sardines almost unavailable at that time. This episode, involving the Malay fighting men at Farrer Park, has

been independently recorded by Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard on page 248 of his book *Taman Budiman* (A Garden of Kindness):

Haji Ibrahim (one of the prisoners in the same room as Capt. Raja Aman Shah) told me that a tall, well-dressed Malay in civilian clothes came to Farrer Park a few days after the surrender. He was accompanied by two Japanese officers and by a Malay named Ibrahim Yaakub who wore a Japanese uniform and sword, and an armband with the letter 'F' (which was short for Fujiwara Kikan, the Japanese Intelligence Organisation). The Malay civilian, whom I later identified as Mustapha bin Haji Hussain of Matang, Perak – spoke to Raja Aman Shah alone in one corner of the room while Ibrahim Yaakub questioned three Malay Regiment officers – Lt Ariffin, Lt Ibrahim Sidek and Lt Abdul Wahid. Mustapha was a Perak Malay and knew Raja Aman Shah well. While they spoke quietly, Ibrahim Yaakub criticised the Malay officers in a loud voice for fighting for the British against the Japanese, then with a final look of hatred he turned to the door and walked down the stairs, calling Mustapha to follow. This he (Mustapha) did, a few moments later, with obvious reluctance.

Capt. Raja Aman Shah rejoined his fellow prisoners. "That was a friend from Taiping", he said. "He is in close touch with Fujiwara, the head of the Japanese Intelligence and he promised to do everything possible to secure my release. I told him that I wanted you all to be freed with me, but he replied that this would be very difficult. He explained that the Japanese army was clamouring for vengeance against members of the Malay Regiment who had resisted their advance on the island so stubbornly and had caused them many casualties. As he was leaving I said to him, 'If God wills let us all be freed: if not, let us die together.'" After a pause, Raja Aman Shah added, "My friend has gone to search for some food, I told him that we were very hungry." Tinned food was at a premium in Singapore and could not be bought in the open market, but Mustapha knew of a small stockpile, and a few hours later a car delivered two crates of tinned sardines, the only protein that the Malay officers consumed during the remainder of their stay at Farrer Park.

Back to my story. Ibrahim told me he would wait for me downstairs and stomped out. I then walked towards Lt Ariffin. He still looked fit and handsome, standing ramrod straight with his lieutenant pips still shining on his shoulders. With his usual disarming smile, he received me with a cynical question, "Where is your 'F' armband and your pistol?" I replied, "In my pocket." I then realised that Onan Haji Siraj had visited and threatened them with his pistol. I tried to speak with Ariffin, my hometown friend. We were in the same cadet corps at the King Edward VII School, where we wore no rank and were always in the back row during drill, as we both had no interest in things military.

As Japanese officers were with me, I told him not to touch my body – the Japanese would not like it. I tried to explain that I came with the hope of saving them from being detained as POWs. Unlike Capt. Raja Aman Shah, Ariffin was not serious in listening to what I had to say. Instead, he complained about being forced to do fatigue duty by the

Japanese. He said under international law, POWs should not be coerced to work. I tried to tell him that Japan was not a signatory to such international laws. "Furthermore, Ariffin, you should know that in times like this, one cannot really argue with the Japanese. It is best to just do what they say – to save everyone's skin." I then spoke to everyone in the room to take care of themselves, to behave, do fatigue duty as asked and try to follow orders. I bade goodbye with a promise to bring their case to the Japanese High Command. Finally, I told them that should a Japanese team interview them, be careful with their answers as the Japanese were very sensitive. Their lives, I told them, were in their own hands.

The fateful day arrived. In came four American-trained Japanese officers 'to fathom the hearts and minds' of the Malay prisoners. Did they like the 'Asia for the Asians' slogan? Would they carry arms for Japan? How about the Chinese and Eurasian Volunteers detained downstairs? Did they feel like the Malays or were they different? This is where the Malay officers, out of good intentions, gave a wrong answer by professing that they all shared the same feelings. The Japanese interviewers met the next day and came up with an important decision: "All soldiers from Warrant Officer I downwards will be moved to Teluk Kurau School." So, almost the entire group of 400 Malay soldiers left for the Teluk Kurau School, leaving behind the six Malay officers named earlier and two Chinese Volunteer officers.

Then came an order that everyone who came from Peninsula Malaya could return home in trains provided by the Japanese. So, most Malay soldiers who were in Teluk Kurau School and those in hiding began to depart for home, except for a few who were suspicious of the new order, like Ibrahim Alla Ditta.² The six Malay officers in Farrer Park were on their own. They were interrogated and brainwashed daily. Their lives were in their own hands. I had already told Capt. Raja Aman Shah and Lt Ariffin to be cautious with their responses as staying alive, or being executed, or being detained as POWs completely depended on their answers. Capt. Raja Aman Shah fully understood me, but Lt Ariffin did not.

Japanese Interrogations: Lt Ariffin's Heroism

They were interrogated for several days at Farrer Park. According to what I heard after the war from Lt Mohd Desa H.A. Rashid,³ Lt Ariffin was the only person trashed by the Japanese during their detention, sometimes with his own swagger stick. As recorded in Malaya's military history, the

six Malay officers and eighty others were executed in Beduk at the end of February.⁴ I was distraught beyond words because all six were my friends. We KMM members did not know anything about it. Only God knows how deep my regret was.

None of the Japanese I talked to uttered a word, and their expressions were inscrutable. But after much pressure for an explanation, I was finally told why. Chief Interpreter Otaguro had explained in a low voice, “Mustapha-san, you must also understand our position. They had fought so bravely for the British and if we were to set them free, would they not be agents of the British stay-behind parties?” Otaguro then kept his eyes cast downwards as he could not bear to see my face.

I later found from Lt Mohd. Desa that right to his last breath, Lt Ariffin refused to strip off his pips. This feisty and high-spirited Malay officer kept replying, “We Malay Regiment officers are POWs and cannot be forced to work”, and “I refuse to follow Japanese orders. I only take orders from my senior officers.” I dare say that Lt Ariffin was the greatest hero of all our heroic Malay officers. I know he would not bow under any pressure. He was also the officer who kept reminding his brother officers not to leave their men. I believe my friend Lt Ariffin had lined up to face Japanese executioners calmly, valiantly and with dignity. He is truly a loyal hero.

Trap for Malay Soldiers and Volunteers

After most of the soldiers had been released and allowed to return home in trains arranged by the Japanese, another trap was cast. Out of the blue, there appeared an office, probably by an agent for the Police, to lure out those in hiding. This agent was a Singaporean and not a KMM member. News was spread that whoever reported to this office, would be given \$5 a day and a free train ticket on the day they were to leave for home. Initially, few people reported, but when word about the \$5 got around, it was too attractive for some. Many turned up. If we ask Malay soldiers who are still alive today, especially those who escaped this trap, they blame the soldiers themselves for being greedy. Even those with money reported.

As a consequence, 80 people, including a soldier’s wife from Kelantan, were collected and handed over to the Japanese. They were all killed. The demon responsible for concocting this plan was given a high-ranking position in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation. He was brutal and for that he was sentenced to several years’ imprisonment when the British returned.

The Fate of Chinese and Eurasian Volunteer Officers at Farrer Park

I was willing to lend a helping hand to anybody, commoner or royalty, Malay or non-Malay, but it was beyond my power to help everyone. This is my biggest regret. For example, as I was walking upstairs to visit Malay prisoners at Farrer Park, I happened to see my former student at Serdang, a Melaka Chinese who was a Lieutenant in the Malacca Volunteer Force. When his eyes caught sight of me through his thick pair of glasses, a small smile of recognition flashed across his face. Then his eyes reflected a kind of surprise at my presence. But when he saw that I was walking among a group of Japanese, our eyes met again. This time, he sent me a look of deepest imaginable contempt. I need not describe my feelings over this painful event. I was truly ashamed to have become a leader of a Japanese Fifth Column (Malay Section) – that was why I never wore my ‘F’ armband, unlike a certain KMM member who, since our Ipoh days, had paraded with a pistol in his hand.

I tried to save the lives of Chinese and Eurasian Volunteer officers by explaining at great length to the Japanese that Chinese and Eurasian Volunteers were merely government servants forced to participate in the Volunteer Force. I was at one time a Volunteer myself. These Chinese and Eurasian Volunteers, I clarified, were not the Dalforce, a group hastily formed in Singapore by the British after the Japanese invaded Malaya. (Dalforce derived its name from its leader, Lt Col J.D. Dalley of the FMS Police Force, responsible for civilian counter-intelligence operations in Malaya. About 2,000 strong, Dalforce members were rapidly trained, poorly armed and only completed their training on 5 February 1942, ten days before Singapore fell. They only wore sashes and were responsible for painting anti-Japanese slogans on buildings.)

I tried to convince the Japanese that Chinese and Eurasian Volunteers posed no threats but the Japanese were fearful of Volunteers. They perceived Volunteers in the same light as guerrillas. They were firmly convinced, despite everything I said to the contrary, that Volunteers were synonymous with guerrillas. Apparently, in Japanese terminology, ‘volunteers’ and ‘guerrillas’ were almost one and the same. It goes without explaining the intense hatred the Japanese harboured against ‘guerrillas’ based on their China experience. It is with a deep sense of sadness I record that Chinese and Eurasian Volunteers were not given food, although Malay detainees received a ball of boiled rice flavoured with some watery chilly sauce at 11.00 am each morning. Chinese and Eurasian Volunteers therefore depended on Malay detainees to give them some of their own. This was what I came to learn when I visited Farrer Park.

Soldiers and Their Families Return Home

In late February and early March 1942, with the help of KMM, hundreds of Malay soldiers and their family members left for home in Peninsula Malaya. Some left on their own, some in trucks and trains arranged by the Japanese. While Ibrahim was busy running other things, Chikgu Abu Samah and the wily Ibrahim Alla Ditta helped me send off the soldiers and their families. Whether the soldiers knew of my contribution is not important. What is important to me was that I had used my position as a KMM leader and my good relations with the Japanese, especially Major Fujiwara and his men, to save, assist and free my own people. Should anyone remember me, it would be nice to hear from them.

Capt. Raja Aman Shah's Heroism

This story has never been told until now, 20 October 1986. Volunteer Officer Jaafar bin Mampak, my good friend and brother officer in the Agricultural Department, planned to escape together with Capt. Raja Aman Shah. But the latter declined the offer and said in Perak Malay, "Pak Por, you should escape. You have many children. If you die, you have nobody to look after them. In my case there are people who can look after my family. If the Japanese were to come and investigate, I will give you the necessary cover." So said this selfless man who put the interests of others above all else.

And so when darkness fell, this old pal of mine escaped from the POW detention camp at Farrer Park and took shelter in a house where he slept among corpses. He then worked his way to a certain alley in Singapore where many ex-soldiers were in hiding. With a Fujiwara (KMM) Pass from me he later left for home. He thus escaped the massacre on Beduk Beach.

Arrests and Allegations in Singapore

Thirty years after the war was over Ibrahim wrote to me that "in view of the fact that educated Malays were scarce, KMM did all it could to save the lives of several educated Malays from Japanese decapitation, among them Captain Hashim (died of illness in 1943); Yusof bin Ishak (Editor of *Utusan Melayu* daily and later first President of Singapore); Police Inspector Hamzah from Kelantan; MVI Captain Mohd Ali bin Mohamed from Pahang; MVI Captain Tunku Muhammad bin Tunku Besar Burhanuddin from Negeri Sembilan; MVI Captain Jaafar from Perak; Police Inspector Abdul Rahim from Singapore and many others. It was

to save them that we protected them.” Now that I have explained the situation at KMM House, I can narrate events that took place there, with signed statements by the persons involved to support my account.⁵ I must record everything because copies of the letter – distorting history and my reputation – were sent by Ibrahim to the late Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak and three academicians.

The persons to be credited for saving the lives of educated Malays were KMM members loyal to me. It must also be mentioned that the arrests of many Malays in Singapore were effected by someone closely related to Ibrahim, and he knew it. KMM member Johar bin Kerong has stated:

After arriving in Singapore, I was brought to KMM House in Bukit Timah where I met Enchik Mustapha (my former teacher), Onan, Ibrahim Yaakub, some members who had moved from Peninsula Malaya like I did, as well as KMM members just released from the Outram Road and Changi prisons. My friends and I were ordered by Ibrahim Yaakub and Onan to go out and inform Malay soldiers to report to Farrer Park. But Enchik Mustapha ordered me and my friends loyal to him to do the opposite, not to let Malay soldiers go to Farrer Park, fearing the possibility of them being detained as POWs.

In carrying out Enchik Mustapha's counter-order, we met and took back to KMM House Malay officers in hiding in Malay *kampungs* in Jalan Yunus. They were Captain Salleh bin Sulaiman, Captain Dr Abbas bin Alias, Captain Tunku Muhammad bin Tunku Besar Burhanuddin, Chief Inspector Hamzah from Kelantan and others. I was then ordered by Onan to watch Inspector Hamzah closely even if he went to the toilet.

The above statement points to the identity of the aggressor who used his power to arrest and detain Malays accused of being pro-British. The truth was Ibrahim tried to flex his muscles ‘like a tiny snake wanting to appear like a dragon’. That was why it shocked me to read his claim that he had saved the lives of these Malays. Let me write briefly about some of them.

Captain N.M. Hashim

Before the War, I had met this retired Co-operative Officer at the School of Agriculture in Serdang when he came to talk about the co-operative movement to a group of village headmen. While in Singapore, I did not even see his shadow. But Captain Salleh bin Sulaiman, who stayed in the same house in which Captain Hashim was detained, told me later, “I heard the sound of cries coming from the room.” I don't know when this old man was released, but I was told he later died of a mental illness.

I was hardly at KMM House as I was busy looking into the affairs of Malay soldiers and their families. Furthermore, I felt unwanted by the

new KMM leadership. I found more fulfilment spending my time helping others in real difficulty all over the island. I believe Ibrahim implicated me in some brutal actions to cover up wrongdoings committed by him and another KMM member.

Yusof Ishak

Yusof Ishak, my cousin and Editor of *Utusan Melayu*, was hauled in from his office still wearing his tattered clothes after being subjected to several shellings. When I came across Yusof detained at KMM House, I told Ibrahim, "If Yusof has done something wrong, he should be given a chance to explain himself before being punished. Wait till I return." Ibrahim did not heed my words. No one laid a finger on Yusof; he was released a week later after signing a short statement to co-operate with the new regime. But he looked lost and confused; it was Ibrahim's way of humiliating a business rival in the newspaper industry. Yusof's brother Aziz wrote in his memoirs: "After the British surrendered, KMM members arrested my brother Yusof and several important Malays seen as pro-British, including Captain N.M. Hashim and Captain Ali."

I believe Ibrahim is claiming to have saved Yusof Ishak to prepare the ground for his return to Singapore after having fled to Indonesia 31 years ago. He is lucky that both Captain N.M. Hashim and Yusof Ishak are no longer alive; they might just arrest him upon arrival in Singapore and have him declared persona non grata.

Police Inspector Hamzah of Kelantan

Arrested by Onan Haji Siraj and Ibrahim, he was locked up at KMM House. KMM member Johar bin Kerong was ordered by Onan to shoot Hamzah if he attempted escape.

When the war ended, Ibrahim and Onan fled to Indonesia, leaving me to receive the first punch from Inspector Hamzah. According to CID officer Jalaluddin Abu Bakar, whose life I had saved during the invasion of Malaya, Hamzah wanted revenge against KMM members. I am not surprised by his reaction; he had every reason to be vengeful. Inspector Hamzah came to Kuala Lumpur to press charges, but was dissuaded by other Malay Police Officers who reminded him that he owed much to KMM. It was KMM member Abdul Kadir Adabi who had saved his daughter (Datin Rahmah), then stranded in Johore when Hamzah moved south to Singapore. Inspector Hamzah contained himself and the matter died down. I am trying to obtain a sworn account of this meeting, but have not been successful.⁶

Captain Mohd Ali bin Mohamed

Now Datuk Kurnia Wira Di Raja, Pahang, he had been a Malay School Supervisor. Forty years after the war ended, he responded to my letter on 19 December 1986, which in part reads:

I knew that you had assisted us to get back to our homes and saved (us) from the Japanese hands.... Ibrahim Yaakub was loyal to the Japanese and not his own people. Should the Japanese win World War II, he would have been the King of Malays.... He could have saved many officers of the Malay Regiment.... I do not know where Ibrahim is. He must be in Indonesia. He lost his pension as a teacher. The Malaysian Government ignored him.⁷

Captain Tunku Muhammad bin Tunku Besar Burhanuddin was from Negeri Sembilan. I cannot remember much about events concerning him except that he was one of the Volunteer officers whom KMM helped. I do not remember **MVI Lt Jaafar**, said to be from Perak, and did not meet **Inspector Abdul Rahim** of Singapore.

Captain Mohd Salleh bin Sulaiman

I had known him since my Agricultural Assistant days in Tapah in 1931. He was a Magistrate and my home was like his own. We spent many hours spinning yarns and talking about everything under the sun. In July 1975, 30 years after the war, I visited him in his home in Kelang. Aged 72 and no longer golfing and driving on doctor's orders, his personality had not changed one bit. We tried to recapture our youthful days that rainy afternoon together with former KMM member Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman.

Captain Salleh recounted⁸ that soon after the war broke out, he had to withdraw from Ipoh aerodrome to retreat south to Kampar, Bidor, Tanjung Malim, Port Dickson, Johore Baru and, finally, Singapore. There, he found shelter in Haji Ali's house in Jalan Yunus together with Captain Raja Aman Shah where they performed civil duties such as burying war victims. It was there that KMM members found him and brought him back to KMM House. He added that as soon as he caught sight of me at KMM House, he felt relieved and secure. Later, with passes from me, he and many others went home to Batu Gajah in a goods train. He regained his old job and was later transferred to Grik as District Officer. Force 136 men under Col Peter G. Dobbie sought him out. This aroused Japanese suspicions and he was arrested and placed under house arrest until the British returned. After that he was transferred to Ipoh.

Captain Dr Abbas bin Haji Alias⁹

He was from the Mobile Field Ambulance Unit of the FMS Volunteer Force and was a soft-spoken and gentle person. He had treated me at the Kuala Lumpur Malay Hospital before my discharge on 5 December 1941, three days before the Japanese Invasion. After the capitulation of Singapore, KMM members loyal to me found him hiding in a Malay kampung in Singapore and brought him to KMM House, where I introduced him to all my friends as 'my doctor'. No one dared to make him do any work. Later, I gave him a pass to go home with Captain Salleh bin Sulaiman.

Fully aware of the importance of knowledge, especially among Malays, when Captain Dr Abbas left Singapore I handed to him volumes of expensive medical books found in KMM House. The books would be better off with Dr Abbas than left to the chaos of war. He returned to Malaya on a goods train, like thousands of others, and arrived in Kuala Lumpur two and a half days later. He was given his old job. He later led the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS), but eventually lost the leadership. Recently (in 1976), he came to look for me in my Matang home. He was the only person who took the trouble to look for an old man who had once assisted him. Memories are often in short supply in times of peace.

I have also received a letter of appreciation from General Tan Sri Abdul Hamid bin Bidin, former Chief of the Malaysian Armed Forces and President of the Ex-Servicemen's Association.¹⁰ Readers should decide if Ibrahim's claims that he saved these people from being killed by the Japanese are valid. I was the one who, upon handing over KMM leadership to Ibrahim on 17 February 1942 had reminded everyone, "Do not cause harm to any educated Malay. There are only a handful of them. An educated person is worth a thousand of the uneducated."

KMM's Role in Singapore

KMM helped soldiers and Volunteers in difficulties out of a natural motivation to help others, especially the Malays. I had done my share despite knowing my actions could arouse Japanese suspicions. But sad to say, there were two KMM members who became too pro-Japanese because of greed. Their craving for wealth eroded whatever nationalistic sentiments and camaraderie they once had. They no longer remembered the sacred word *Merdeka* (Independence). When the Japanese ordered Malay soldiers to assemble at Farrer Park, they blindly followed the order.

It was a blessing that many KMM members on my side were willing to carry out my orders although these countermanded that from the

Japanese. These brave KMM members, mostly from Serdang, should be commended for bringing back many Malay soldiers and Volunteers to KMM House, where they were safe until their return home. They had to ride in open goods trains and hang from the sides of coaches. Some even sat on top of moving trains. Safe return was the utmost priority in their minds.

I am also very pleased to announce that some other KMM members like Ahmad Boestamam, Shamsuddin Salleh, Baهران Alang Ahmad, Johar bin Kerong, Musa, Chikgu Junid and others completely disregarded some orders. Ahmad Boestamam¹¹ has stated that he was ordered to look for Eurasians and Europeans, but came back empty-handed. He thinks that was why he was sent home to Malaya the next day. I must state that most KMM members were dedicated, disciplined, warm and humane. According to Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako), KMM member Zainal Abidin Kassim whom I had plucked from his home in Tapah Road to move south with me had found himself in a Bata shoe godown in Johore Baru. The pair of shoes he wore was already ripped at the toes, yet he did not have the heart to 'take' a pair of expensive shoes. This was also the feisty KMM member who saved Sgt Shaari bin Muhammad and eighteen others from the Japanese forces at a Singapore warfront.

I assisted everyone to the best of my ability. In fact, I helped several members of Malay royal households (Raja Ahmed Hisham, Raja Tun Uda, Tunku Mohammad bin Tunku Besar Burhanuddin, Col Raja Lope Rashid) and several prominent Malays from the Japanese hands. That is why I regret reading the book *Looking Back*, in which former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman accused KMM members of being against Malay royalty. He stated that both Pak Sako and Ibrahim asked him: "Why did your brother-in-law Capt. Raja Aman Shah fight on the side of the British?" The two did not in any way express anti-royal sentiments, but simply an anti-British attitude.

I am puzzled why F Kikan officers did not co-operate with Tunku Abdul Rahman when he came to Singapore to look for his brother-in-law, Capt. Raja Aman Shah. In fact, Major Fujiwara did everything within his powers and travelled up and down to present KMM's request to the Japanese High Command that all Malay soldiers and Volunteers be released unconditionally. Furthermore, the Tunku and Major Fujiwara had met in Kedah days after Japanese troops landed in Malaya. So did Ohta, a Japanese barber who had lived in Alor Star for many years. Although Major Fujiwara held only a major's rank, he was very powerful as he was closely linked to the Japanese imperial household. That was one reason why KMM's requests for many things were always given due

attention. Although KMM did not manage to save the six Malay officers, KMM still contributed a great deal. I dare say that I was myself able to influence the Japanese to:

- 1) not kill Malay Regiment soldiers and Volunteers en masse although this had initially been decided by the Japanese General Staff to avenge the Japanese casualties.
- 2) not detain Malay Regiment soldiers as POWs throughout the entire Japanese Occupation of three years and eight months. In fact, many soldiers gained employment from the Japanese later on.
- 3) not send the Malay Regiment soldiers to the Burmese warfront unlike the British and Australian soldiers.
- 4) norgive those in hiding all over Singapore and allow them to return home.
- 5) deliver food and give money to the families of Malay soldiers living in fear and hunger in Istana Kampung Gelam and later arrange for them to return home using Japanese trucks and trains.

All this constituted a victory for me, and a big blessing to the remaining one-and-a-half battalions of soldiers. Parents did not lose sons, wives did not lose husbands, and children were spared from becoming orphans.

True, I was equipped with a special Japanese pass, but like many others, I was not spared some painful experiences. I had been threatened with a bayonet and was once a marked man for carrying out anti-Japanese activities. For example, I was seen entering a detention camp alone, but leaving with a few others. Often, I – and those with me – were given tight slaps on the face. I was also trashed for refusing to bow to a Japanese sentry.

My advance with Fujiwara Kikan from Taiping to Singapore was pure destiny; they came to ‘invite’ me at my family home in Matang because Ibrahim had colluded with them before the Invasion. Completely unaware of the secret pact, I thank God for giving me the presence of mind to seize the advantage to help civilians, women, soldiers and their families. I went through bitter and harrowing experiences throughout the move. What had I not seen? But who knows how my heart, soul and mind suffered? Who knows how, for tens of years afterwards, many of these experiences lived within me. All that I saw – the horror, the gruesome spectacles, the blood – cannot be wiped clean from my mind. Somewhere in me, the past resides forever.

My co-operation with the Japanese was not a sincere gesture to promote their interests. I was out to assist and save ill-fated victims of war. I hated all forms of colonisation, Japanese or British, but I fostered

good relations with the Japanese to ensure my activities to help my own people would go unnoticed under their noses.

Malay Regiment Petition

After Britain re-established itself in 1945, I was jailed in two lock-ups and in Batu Gajah Prison. My father visited me several times. Although he tried to hide it, his face bore the saddest expression. His heart was shattered. My older brother Alli lost his life to the MPAJA a year earlier and my younger brother Yahaya was killed by the same party just a couple of months before I was detained. And now, I was languishing in a British prison.

Without my knowledge, my father had travelled 250 miles in a timber lorry to meet Malay soldiers at the Malay Regiment Camp in Port Dickson. There he met Major Ibrahim Alla Ditta MC to inform him of my misfortune and his own pain at seeing me in jail after having lost two sons in the space of one year. With the help of Major Ibrahim Alla Ditta and Sgt Harun bin Haji Musa (whom I had saved from a heap of corpses), 400 signatures of soldiers whom I had helped, directly or indirectly, were collected in a petition. This petition was sent to the British Field Security Service (FSS) Chief, appealing that I not be killed and instead be released immediately. They even suggested an award for my good deeds towards war victims. I had no knowledge of the petition containing 400 names and signatures until 17 November 1975, thirty years later, when I met Major Ibrahim Alla Ditta and his friends.

After the petition's receipt, I was taken to meet an FSS officer in Kuala Lumpur where I was rained with hundreds of questions, but he did not care to disclose that a petition had reached the FSS desk. He did not congratulate me or express any appreciation for my help to so many people. Typical colonial attitude! All he wanted to know was how many British lives I had saved. It was as if the lives of hundreds of Malays were unworthy. Saving the lives of hundreds of Malay soldiers was not all that impressive to him! In *Red Star over Malaya* (p. 271), Dr Cheah Boon Kheng recorded that: "Mustapha Hussain was subsequently taken into custody, but several months later after petitions were made to the BMA from former members of the Malay Regiment whose lives he had saved from the Japanese, he was released."

Notes

1. *Translator's Note:* My father's failure to save the lives of Capt. Raja Aman Shah and several other Malay officers weighed heavily on his mind until he drew his last

breath. The last two letters he wrote were penned the night before a heart attack which led to his death five days later in Tawakkal Hospital, Kuala Lumpur. Both letters were about this particular episode of his life. One was addressed to former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, brother-in-law of the late Capt. Raja Aman Shah. In his last few days, my father kept asking if the letters had been posted. His letter clearly reflects the feelings of a man trying to pass his last message on before leaving this world fraught with trials and tribulations.

“I am a sick man with cataracts and other old man’s complaints. So, before I pass away, I would like you to read documents on your brother-in-law’s Capt. Raja Aman Shah’s (also my friend) bravery and loyalty. From it you will see how I tried to save him and also read of the person responsible for the death of our brave officers at Beduk. They were all faithfully recorded by Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard.”

The other letter was for former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn to inform him of how my father had assisted Datuk Onn, Tun Hussein’s father, just before the capitulation of Singapore.

“I have been an ardent admirer of your late father through his newspaper columns. Sorry for this poor handwriting as I am suffering from cataracts. I am 77 now and wish to pass you some information of how I had assisted your father in WWII. In the war, I was with F Kikan through the machinations of Ibrahim Yaakub. When I heard that Datuk Wan Mohd Salleh and one other were beaten up severely by the Japanese, I quickly went to look for your father. You may read the rest in a newspaper article. Thus, he escaped from Japanese brutality.

“In my activities I asked the Japanese to declare our nation’s Independence twice, and was able to help hundreds of people caught in the war, especially our Malay soldiers and their families stranded in Singapore and poor Malay Volunteers. But after the War was over, I was locked up by the British and lost my job as a lecturer at Serdang and also my pensions. I am now a sick man waiting for my day. Herewith a Star article, one from a Malay newspaper and one page of Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard’s book.”

From these last two letters written five days before he died, one can also see how important the publication of his memoirs was to him. As his daughter who inherited his 450-page manuscript, publication of his memoirs has almost become my life’s obsession. I end this chapter with my father’s concluding line on this episode of his life: “I conclude with my deepest sorrow that I was unable to save the lives of all our people.”

2. Major Ibrahim’s statement is appended to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 14, pp. 618-21).
3. Lt Mohd Desa’s statement is appended to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 15, pp. 622-24).
4. On the massacre, read ‘The Massacre on Beduk Hills’, by Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard in *The Straits Times* dated 3 March 1966. An account by Lt Mohd Desa bin H.A. Rashid is appended to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 15, pp. 622-24). Another appended account by Sergeant Jamaluddin became an illustrated series ‘The Story of Sergeant Jamaluddin’ in *Mingguan Malaysia*, 10 and 17 July 1984 (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 16, pp. 625-26).
5. Many more of these are included in the Malay version of my memoirs as appendices (Mustapha Hussain, 1999).

6. The statement by Johar bin Kerong is relevant here (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 24, pp. 637-46).
7. Extract from statement by Captain Mohd Ali bin Mohammed (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 17, p. 627).
8. Capt. Salleh's statement is appended to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 18, pp. 628-29).
9. Captain Dr Abbas's statement is appended to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 19, p. 630).
Editor's Note: Dr Abbas later became President of PAS, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, as well as Director of the University Hospital.
10. Included in the Malay version of my memoirs as an appendix (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 20, p. 631).
11. Included in the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 23, pp. 634-36).

At KMM House: Allegations and Arrests

Thirty years after the war was over, Ibrahim Yaakub explained in a letter to me why he rejected the family name ‘Bayu’ (short for *Bapa Melayu* or Father of the Malays) I had bestowed on him. He wrote: “It was dangerous and pointless.”

The idea that Malays adopt family names like the Young Turks, was mooted at a KMM meeting in Kuala Lumpur in January 1942, when the war was still raging. We saw it as a constructive social change to boost family solidarity and in line with the practice of many developed nations. Turkish leader Mustafa Kamal Pasha was named Kamal ‘Ataturk’ or ‘The Father of Turkey’. His best friend earned the title ‘Inunu’ for his resounding victory against the Allied Forces in Inunu. This practice was not alien to Malays as some Sumatran families carry family names.

When Ibrahim rejected the ‘Bayu’ honour, KMM member Abdul Kadir Adabi presented it to me, saying, “You are more deserving, brother!” As I had no opportunity to use it, I named my son Roslan Bayu and he continued the tradition by naming his two children Azzlanshah Bayu and Nadia Bayu. Hopefully, the name ‘Bayu’, a sweet remembrance of my KMM days, will live on.

The Malay Farm or *Kebun Ubi* in Singapore

The Jalan Malcolm house the Japanese converted into KMM House was once a European doctor’s residence and stored many interesting things. A personally appealing item was a metal tortoise consisting of 13 blocks. The tortoise, or *Kame* in Japanese, was significant to us as it was KMM’s symbol. (Haji Yahaya, a leftist Perak politician, told us that he saw the same tortoise in Ibrahim Yaakub’s house in Jakarta many years later.)

Books, tomes and a set of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* lined one wall of the study. Underneath the house were packet after packet of seeds – cucumber, ladies fingers, long beans, French beans, gourds and others – except for tapioca. There were also hundreds of farming tools. I guess

the British planned to convert the island into a 'Green Earth' should it come under a long-running siege.

One newly-released KMM member staying in the house was Chikgu Junid. An SITC-trained teacher, he carried with him two skills wherever he went – farming and basketry – both inherited from the British education system. Chikgu Junid was ecstatic to find the seeds and farming tools. We took them to a Malay *kampung* and started the Malay Farm, better known as *Kebun Ubi*. My brother Yahaya, an Agricultural Assistant, assisted Chikgu Junid, but left the farm when Onan came into the picture. All credit should go to Chikgu Junid and Ahmad bin Mohd Amin who toiled on the farm that we hoped would help feed the Malays in the area. It had nothing to do with the Malay struggle against Japan as claimed by Ibrahim in his letter to me.

Japanese Language

I learned from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that the Japanese language was not easy to master. I am writing this because it had something to do with my life. After the capitulation of Singapore, I was invited by Chief Interpreter Otaguro, who would become Director of Education (but died weeks later), to serve as his assistant. I declined due to health and other reasons.

After Ibrahim 'finished' with my cousin Yusof Ishak, I tried to 'save his face' and revive his spirits by inviting him to formulate with me an education syllabus for Malay students during the Japanese Occupation. We prepared a report covering primary, secondary and tertiary education, up to the university level. The main thrust was to assure no Malay pupil becomes victim of the new education system; everyone would be moulded into responsible citizens. For example, slow learners at primary level would, after completing school, be channelled to trade schools and basic agriculture classes until they could be self-sufficient. Those not performing well in secondary schools would be trained to work in factories and plants. The better secondary level students would be employed in mid-professional occupations. Finally, the brainy ones would be encouraged to become doctors, teachers, managers and planners. As such, no Malay pupil would be a victim of the system. Unfortunately, the Japanese Military Administration 'Nipponised' the Malays.

Malai Senden-Ka Replaces KMM

Shortly after the British surrender, many KMM members who came from Peninsula Malaya as Fifth Columnists, KMM members just released from

British detention, Malay Regiment men, and Volunteer Force members returned to their homes in Peninsula Malaya. KMM House was no longer a hub of activities.

One night, while the few remaining KMM members were talking about the future of the Malays under the Japanese Military Administration, Chief Interpreter Otaguro and two other Japanese came to see us. If I remember right, Ibrahim, Onan, Hassan Haji Manan, Abdul Karim Rashid, myself and three or four others were in the room. Otaguro inquired if KMM leaders had already received their commendation letters. Then, choosing his words with extreme care, he said, "Now that the war is over, KMM functions are no longer appropriate. It is time we replace it with a new body. Your primary role would be to disseminate information to the public." When we did not respond, he went on, most sweetly, "KMM is a political body and a political body has a limited life span. Only cultural bodies survive for centuries. So, what we want to establish, Malai Senden-Ka, is a cultural body." I told myself, "We are being played out!"

Although we told Otaguro that we needed time to discuss the matter at length, we knew we had no choice. The announcement brought gloom; had our faces been spliced with a knife, no blood would have oozed out. I felt as if our heads had been separated from our bodies by a samurai sword, with our heads rolling in the dirt and our blood spurting out of our jugular veins. But I was not surprised; I had read this! What use was KMM to a new colonial power after it had secured Malaya and Singapore? This is the politics of colonisation! Had I not seen a film where Japan killed all its Fifth Columnists after its occupation of Manchuria?

We began drafting the proposed body's constitution but deep in our hearts we consoled ourselves by saying, "At least we are not yet dead." Ishak Haji Muhammad's expertise was crucial in drafting the new body's constitution but he had distanced himself from Onan and Ibrahim. Ishak, an honest-to-goodness person was intolerant of hypocrisy and could not accept some of their doings. But I sought Ishak at his newspaper office and managed to persuade him to help us draft the document. The new body had six pillars based on the six sides of a hexagon, the Japanese symbol for KMM. One word for each side:

1. *Bersatu* (To Unite)
2. *Bersetia* (To Show Loyalty)
3. *Berkhidmat* (To Serve)
4. *Berbahagia* (To be Happy)
5. *Berbakti* (To Serve the People)
6. *Berhemah Tinggi* (Courtesy)

Some of the body's objectives were:

1. Loyalty to the Emperor of Japan *Tenno Heika*.
2. Respect for Japan's flag *Hinomaru*.
3. Strive for 'Asia for the Asians' and the 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere'.
4. Dissemination of information to the Malayan public.

I have forgotten some others as this happened 34 years ago. We abhorred the whole idea, but what could we do? Wise Ishak advised us, "Friends, put on a happy face and play up to them!" After the drafting was completed, Ishak returned to his newspaper *Berita Malai* office all by himself; he did not request for a car from the Japanese even though there were hundreds around. That was Ishak Haji Muhammad, a true Malay freedom fighter and a selfless nationalist!

Senden-Ka's formation was recorded by Lt General Fujiwara Iwachi in his book *F Kikan – Japanese Army Intelligence* (pp. 189-190). He wrote: "(On 18 February 1942) after he (Ibrahim Yaakub) had left, I at once visited Major General Manaki, Deputy Chief of Staff, and asked his understanding and assistance to guide the KMM to be the leading cultural association for the improvement of the standard of Malay culture, shedding its character as a political association. At that time, the Japanese Army was taking an obstinate and short-sighted policy that banned indigenous people's associations engaged in political, economic and cultural activities.... After more than half an hour of argument, Major General Manaki gave in and agreed to recognise the KMM as a cultural association charged with the task of enlightening Malay youths." Therefore, Ibrahim's claim that KMM was dissolved in mid-1942 is inaccurate.

More on Singapore

One night, Ibrahim and I were already in bed, talking about political developments and the war in Europe and South-East-Asia, when sporadic explosions, big and small, shook our beds violently. (We found out later that an ammunition store had been sabotaged by an unknown party.) Ibrahim blurted out, "That must be an American counter attack! What shall we do?" I told him, "Let us wait and see. If it is truly what you think it is, we have to find a way out. We may have to sneak into the other side." His response – "If I knew this was coming, I would have fled to Australia... with the money" – shocked me. I knew then that Ibrahim had received some money from the Japanese and would have liked to save his own skin, but now felt it was too late. From that

moment on, I knew his heart was not one of a freedom fighter, but that of a mercenary.

Many KMM members had complained to Ibrahim about his brother-in-law, Onan. That same night, Ibrahim Yaakub confided that he was willing to divorce his wife to rid himself of Onan, his wife's brother. I talked him out of it as his wife had nothing to do with Onan's behaviour.

Later, after completing my report on the Fifth Columnist movement from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore, I was instructed by Major Fujiwara to prepare a list of names of KMM members who participated, and the jobs they expected from the new regime. Ishak told me simply, "Just write I want to return to my job as a newspaperman." That was typical of Ishak, a nationalist who struggled with his soul. Ibrahim told me to skip his name and write what I wanted for myself. "To get rid of opportunists and to fight for Independence no matter what," I told him.

Pledge on the Qur'an

Ibrahim and I once pledged on the Qur'an, "One For All; All For One," after the fall of Singapore. This is why I was deeply hurt when he hurled false allegations against me and distorted the truth. I am writing these memoirs, not only to safeguard my descendents' good name, but also for the present generation of Malays. It was only after receiving his letter that I, who had shut my mouth for 31 years, decided to expose everything. Otherwise, I would have carried my story to my grave.

KMM Members' Disappointment

After handing over KMM leadership to Ibrahim on 17 February, I saw him and Onan busy exchanging money. I thought the money was to be distributed among the hundred or so KMM members. But from recent investigations, I found from KMM members like Ahmad Boestamam,¹ Mohd Mustafa bin Ali² and Johar bin Kerong that no one received anything from Ibrahim or Onan.

I Almost Shot a Japanese Officer

While in Singapore, I almost shot a Japanese Officer because he had insulted the Malays. It happened when the Officer (not from F Kikan) ordered some KMM members to heave a piano on to a truck. I told him, "KMM members did not come all the way here to carry your stuff. Look for other labourers." He ignored my comment. "KMM members are not

porters,” I protested. The furious Officer asked, “What is your job?” I replied, “I am with Fujiwara Kikan!” He said curtly, “That I know! I want to know your regular job before the war.” I replied that I was a lecturer. Smiling cynically, he challenged me, “Liar! You have no Malay lecturers. Malays are only fit to work as policemen and drivers!” This insult was not one I could swallow. How dare this Japanese humiliate my race! The conflict reached a point where the furious Japanese Officer drew his pistol. So did I, shouting, “Before you shoot me, I will shoot you first,” releasing the safety catch of my pistol.

The Japanese Officer left in a rage to lodge a report with Major Fujiwara. Shortly after, Chief Interpreter Otaguro, who had always been good to me whispered, “Mustapha-san, looks like your nationalist fire is in conflict with Japanese militarist ambitions. It is best you stay away from the Japanese.” He paused to continue, “In Ipoh we had once forgiven you!” referring to my complaints about Japanese soldiers’ despicable behaviour. Finally, in a low voice, he suggested, “Return to Perak and wait for a letter from me. I want you to work with me in the Education Department.” I did not receive any job offer and throughout the Japanese Occupation I was not on their payroll.

Returning Home

Apart from the near shoot-out and Japanese doubts over my loyalty (which I could not give), there were other reasons I returned home. I was concerned about my family whom I had left for over three months without any money or news. (Ibrahim did not have to return anywhere as he lived in Singapore.) I had seen enough war horrors to haunt me for the rest of my life. To top it all, I was informed by Serdang KMM members of a plot to expel me from KMM for constantly questioning Japanese sincerity.

I needed not only a physical rest, but also time to recover my mental health and my soul’s wellbeing.³ In our (KMM members) move from Taiping to Singapore, what had we not seen? In the course of our journey to save our imprisoned friends in Singapore, we saw and experienced gruesome, ugly, brutal and blood-curdling moments. In the rigours of war we saw blood that flowed lazily, blood that spurted in gushes, human heads on spikes at road junctions, heads rolling in the dirt, men shot in air and ground attacks, bloated and rotting bodies full of maggots and corpses buried not deep enough. We could never hope to erase these from our minds. Please do not ask how I feel!

On my return journey, I looked for Raja Ahmed Hisham’s car, which was ‘taken’ by Onan to Johore Baru. Returning to Kuala Lumpur with

Sutan Jenain in the car, we were stopped and checked all along the route by roadblock sentry guards. In Kuala Lumpur, I wrote a letter to M.N. Othman to release Raja Ahmed Hisham. Another letter, from Major Fujiwara, was given to Raja Ahmed Hisham for his safety and security. Sutan Jenain, who helped to send the car, managed to offer Raja Ahmed Hisham a small piece of advice, “Please learn to love your own people!”

Attempting to Set Up a KMM Youth Front in Ipoh

In Ipoh, en route to Matang, I found KMM and Perak Malay Youth Association members under the leadership of A. Talib bin Haji Ahmad residing in the Ipoh Nurses Hostel. I informed Talib of the formation of KMM Youth Front in Kuala Lumpur before KMM’s move to Singapore. He agreed with me that it was time to again galvanise our youth into one which could one day be employed against the Japanese. We should set up a volunteer corps, which would include FMS Volunteers (already trained) around Ipoh. But, no longer under Fujiwara Kikan’s umbrella, we had to seek the approval of Perak’s Japanese Governor or Military Chief, or both.

We approached senior Japanese officers in Ipoh to express our plan to ‘strengthen’ Japanese defence with Malay youths. They replied, “It is not necessary. We have enough fighting men!” I understood their concern – they feared this body would one day be used to oppose them. I made this observation based on my experience with the Japanese and what happened in other occupied territories. Not long after, I was told the young men residing in the nurses’ hostel were evicted. That angered me.

Notes

1. Ahmad Boestamam’s statement is appended to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 23, pp. 634-6).
2. Mohd Mustafa’s statement is appended to the Malay version of my memoirs (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 24, pp. 637-46).
3. *Translator’s Note*: More than three months after leaving his family in hiding in a jungle fringe behind my grandparents’ home, my father returned with \$10 in his pocket. Even though my mother was told the chances of my father returning alive were slim after he was ‘taken’ away by armed Japanese Officers with just the clothes on his back, my mother was hopeful. Her prayers were answered. My father returned because he could not find in his heart the motivation “to serve a new colonial power that did not comprehend Malay aspirations towards Independence.”

Japanese ‘Volunteer’ Army (1943): Picked Up Again¹

In Matang, I found my family safe, but living in fear. With our three children aged between four months and six years, my wife had, for weeks, been hiding in the undergrowth behind our family home except at night. She had darkened her hair with sesame oil and smeared soot on her face to appear less fair.

Here, I’d like to reveal a crucial consideration for my move with the F Kikan. Though Muslim by faith, my wife is a Eurasian by birth. Her Australian father John William Henry Fenner was a well-known Australian tin miner in Kinta, Perak, while her mother, Ng Chew Ni was the daughter of a successful Chinese hardware store owner who supplied tools to European miners in Kamunting, near Taiping. After her Australian father died in 1926, my wife’s Chinese mother remarried a Malay, who took it upon himself to convert the entire family to Islam. Thus, my wife, born Dorothy Ida Fenner, was brought up as a Malay, Mariah binti Haji Abdul Hamid.

She was fair with a mass of curly dark brown hair and prominent European features, facts that worried me. I feared the Japanese might arrest her like they did other Europeans and Eurasians. That was one of several reasons why I ‘went’ with the Japanese when Onan and Pak Chik Ahmad accompanied them to ‘invite’ me. It was best to detract them from ever finding out my wife’s identity. Had I resisted, my wife might have suffered the backlash. That was why I was also alarmed in Singapore when I heard of a Japanese order to KMM members to look for and arrest Eurasians. Was my wife not a Eurasian? This order to look for Eurasians in Singapore was mentioned by prominent Malay politician Ahmad Boestamam in his signed statement.² Perhaps readers can appreciate my predicament when the Japanese came to ‘fetch’ me. I was not only Vice President of Malaya’s first Malay political party, KMM, but a husband who loved his loyal wife who happened to be of Australian extraction.

Upon my return to Matang, due to the war's rigours my nerve disorder worsened. Gruesome images flashed across my eyes in my recurring nightmares. I made a decision to move to my wife's village and to start a small business selling cut fruits to train passengers at Temoh Railway Station, but it did not thrive.

My caring older brother Alli, Perak's Deputy Forest Officer during the Occupation, came to my rescue. He sent me to Lumut Hospital for treatment. Chikgu Junid, one of the Malay Farm founders and also hospitalised with me, used his basketry skills, learned at the SITC, to weave hats for sale. I had to leave the hospital before I was cured; I was the sole breadwinner and there was no more medicine in stock for my problem. With Alli's help, I gained employment as Chief Clerk with Nomura Toindo Kabushiki Kaisha, a Japanese timber company in Lumut. I would like to record here that a year later Alli was abducted and killed by the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) in Tanjung Tualang, Perak. That was the fate of a very industrious, dedicated and caring young man.

In Lumut, we squatted in the home of a nephew (by marriage) Syed Aziz Baftin near the timber company. I served two Japanese men – timber specialist Oga-*san* and accountant Hitori-*san*. I supervised an accounts clerk, an interpreter, an office boy and a Malay clerk who is currently holding an extremely high position in the Malaysian Government. We were all amazed that the Indian office boy learned to speak Japanese fluently overnight.

My family was beginning to enjoy a not-so-deprived life. Chinese contractors supplied us with Siamese rice and other necessities. At that time, Ibrahim Yaakub was living well under Japanese sponsorship in Singapore. Onan had opened two grocery stores in Jalan Joo Chiat, Singapore, which Ishak described 'as filled with goodies'. I wondered what happened to other KMM members who were sent home from Singapore without a penny although there was money allocated for them. Ahmad Boestamam later wrote in his statement, "...the next day we were sent home. We rode in a goods train from Johore Baru. We were not given a cent for the return journey."

Summoned to Kuala Lumpur from Lumut

It was quite a satisfactory job. My two Japanese bosses, especially Hitori-*san*, were kind and willing to listen to my advice on Malay affairs. But less than three months later, just when my emaciated body was beginning to fill out, something upset my life yet once again. An urgent message to

look for me was received by the Japanese Police in the entire state of Perak. It came from the Japanese Military Administration in Singapore. Having located me, a Japanese Corporal from the Lumut Garrison came to order my two Japanese bosses to deliver me post haste to the Batu Gajah Railway Station the same night. My family was alarmed, especially when no one knew why I was summoned. To make matters worse, the Corporal who came was said to be an executioner.

After advising my wife to remain indoors at all times, I travelled in a car with my two Japanese bosses guarding me closely. They had their swords unsheathed, not to intimidate, but to safeguard me, as we had to pass through some of the blackest guerrilla-infested areas during the Occupation. After covering Simpang Empat, Sitiawan (birthplace of Malayan Communist Party's Secretary General Chin Peng), the Gelang Gajah Forest Reserves, Bruas, Parit and Pusing, we reached Batu Gajah. It was then that the two Japanese returned their swords to their scabbards and relaxed a little. If you have read the book *The Jungle is Neutral* by F. Spencer Chapman, DSO, you will realise the extreme peril we were in, had the guerrillas ambushed us. Each mile and each bend we travelled was fraught with the gravest of danger. No one dared to pass those wretched areas in such a pitch-black night.

I bade 'Sayonara' to the two Japanese whose eyes revealed great care and concern. The smiles they flashed me were not their usual cheerful ones. They were equally apprehensive; they too had no idea why I was summoned to Singapore. Based on my vast experience with the Japanese, one should not generalise that 'A good Japanese is a dead one'. Some were extremely caring and kind.³ For example, Major Fujiwara was a highly considerate person, or else Raja Ahmed Hisham would not be alive today! Among the many F Kikan interpreters I knew, some were extremely gentle and would listen to my advice on the Malays.

Throughout the long train journey to Singapore, I suffered deep mental anguish, wondering why the entire Japanese Police Force in Perak had been alerted to look for me. Have they heard some of my whispered conversations with Chikgu Junid and other friends in Lumut?

In Singapore Again

In Singapore I learned why I was summoned. It was to assist the setting up of a new body, the Japanese Volunteer Army Malai Giyu Gun or Pembela Tanah Air (PETA) or 'Defenders of the Homeland'. I was given a room in Fuji Hotel with Pak Chik Ahmad and Abdul Kadir Adabi. Pak

Chik Ahmad was close to Ibrahim and a distant relative of mine. Fuji Hotel, formerly Amber House, was only for Officers.

Among the guests were several Burmese and Siamese citizens, who, like us, were being trained for certain tasks. I got on famously with the Burmese. In our conversations, we found many cultural similarities between the Burmese and the Malays. For example, both people wear headgears, sandals and sarongs. The Burmese also ate rice with vegetables and young shoots. With regard to the Malay language, one Burmese suggested that the Malays coin a suffix to signify plurals instead of doubling words. I recommended 'su' or 'zu'. For example, a plural of *angkasawan* would no longer be *angkasawan-angkasawan*, but just *angkasawansu*. I wrote to the press in the early fifties with this suggestion, but my letter went unpublished.

However, I found the Siamese in Fuji Hotel loathsome, as they looked upon the Malays as inferior. They kept reminding us of past Malay-Siamese conflicts. One of them claimed that had the British not defended Malaya, our entire country would have been overrun by Siam. I had to admit this fact but retorted, "One cannot win all the time." I argued that the Siamese independence was maintained because of its buffer state position. Otherwise they too would have been colonised. The truth was, I disliked talking with them because I resented the Japanese offer of four Malay states (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu) to Siam as a reward for allowing Japanese troops to invade Malaya through their country. That alone created bad blood. To my nationalist friends and I, this was Japan's biggest betrayal.

I probed this sore point with Ibrahim, Onan and other friends who were on the Japanese payroll, to gauge their opinions. Ibrahim did not respond. Onan, however, told me he had told the Japanese off. He had asked them cynically, "Why take only one shoe from us Malays? Why not take both our shoes?" This response could only be uttered by a true nationalist. Malaya was to me a fish the Japanese had cut in two. The better part of mouth, eyes and breathing organs was presented to the Siamese on a silver platter. Most of the other half, though it had plenty of flesh, did not belong to us Malays.

One of KMM's early objectives had been to regain control over the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Melaka, and Penang. Now, on top of those three, we had to strive to recover four states we once had. Is this the fight that Ibrahim described was "for country and people?" Our conversation on this Japanese betrayal took place on July 1943 when we were busy forming the Malai Giyu Gun. The formal presentation of the four states took place later in October the same year.

The Formation of Malai Giyu Gun

Before the formation of Malai Giyu Gun, the Japanese had enquired, "Are you all willing to die for *Tenno Heika* (the Emperor of Japan)?" No one responded. But when they asked, "Are you willing to die for Malaya?" we all shouted "Yes!" at the top of our lungs. Onan thumped his fist loudly on the table in unison.

In the Malai Giyu Gun, Ibrahim was a Lieutenant Colonel (*taiisha*), I was a Major (*shosha*), Hassan Haji Manan, Abdul Karim Rashid and Ramli Haji Tahir Captains (*taii*) and Abdul Kadir Adabi a Lieutenant. Zainal Abidin bin Ali who joined us later was also made a Captain. Onan did not want a lower ranking position than Ibrahim, so he joined the Japanese Volunteer Corps Giyu Tai as Lieutenant Colonel, equivalent to Ibrahim's rank. The Japanese loved this development – a ready-made 'divide and rule' situation.

KMM member Pak Chik Ahmad craved to be an officer with a long sword trailing by his side. I advised him to accept the food controller job in view of his age and poor health. But he insisted. So, I suggested he be given a Second Lieutenant position (*chuii*). Although Pak Chik Ahmad had dreamed of a samurai sword, the one given to the Malays was a Dutch sword with a short curved blade.

At the uniform fitting session, everyone seemed excited, like kids celebrating festive days. Did they not think what lay ahead? Abdul Kadir whispered to me, "If *Bayu* (me) leaves, I will do the same." I winked at him. Although everyone received some kind of training, Abdul Kadir and I excused ourselves from all military training and concentrated on administrative and organising work. We were never interested in things military, and I had been in and out of the FMS Volunteer Force.

Enthusiastic Pak Chik Ahmad attended marching drills, but the heat from both the sun above and the concrete badminton court below was too much for his aging body. One afternoon he returned to our room looking sick. That night, we were invited to dine in a room crowded with Japanese officers and Chinese waiters. A Japanese girl was handing out our rations of matches. Pak Chik Ahmad received his share with *Arigato* and being a very polite person, he bent his head low in a bow to the girl, although according to Japanese custom, the girl should have bowed to him. Japanese officers who saw this laughed aloud.

Abdul Kadir, Pak Chik Ahmad and I sat at one table set with wooden bowls on a wooden tray. The chopsticks, also wooden, were wrapped in paper as stiff as wood. We were served a kind of soup, pickled cabbage, anchovies and a banana. There was also raw fish but for us Malays not

accustomed to 'a beaver's diet', we asked the 'boy' to boil the fish till it was cooked. I asked for a fork and spoon to replace the chopsticks. Then I asked what the meat in the soup was. The 'boy', unable to speak English or Malay, made certain gestures as if the animal had wings. We asked if it was duck, he answered "No." He then gestured his hands to indicate the animal could also swim. We found out it was a tortoise. But what could we do, we had eaten it and it was actually rather tasty. At Fuji Hotel, we were served Japanese food daily except for one day each week when we had bread and western dishes.

That night, stubborn Pak Chik Ahmad shivered under his felt blanket, turned delirious and started crying out for his wife and family four hundred miles away. Abdul Kadir and I were upset with Ibrahim for having brought this old friend into such a situation. When Pak Chik's fever broke, Abdul Kadir asked, "Do you still have lots of property?" The old man was annoyed and asked, "Why?" Abdul Kadir responded, "Well, if you have more, why don't you give whatever you have to Ibrahim?!" Pak Chik Ahmad replied, "That is none of your business!" Although Abdul Kadir meant well, this led to a bitter argument. I learned that contrary to Ibrahim's claim, Abdul Kadir was not close to him.

Three days later, a Japanese Officer from Malai Giyu Gun came to see Pak Chik Ahmad as he had missed several drills. When he saw Pak Chik Ahmad's pale face, he asked, "Has Ibrahim come to see this man?" We shook our heads. The upset officer muttered, "That is very irresponsible of him. If he is a Japanese Officer, he would be punished for not taking care of his men." Ibrahim, he added, should have taken Pak Chik Ahmad to his house for treatment. The Officer obviously knew Ibrahim had a house. Later, I read that Japanese military etiquette expected officers to be committed to the welfare of their men at all times.

A Satanic Man

One evening, while sitting on the balcony of the Fuji Hotel, I saw a man stealthily watching me, but he did not dare enter the hotel which was out of bounds to outsiders, even to the Kempeitai. I told Ibrahim of this incident, but he merely laughed. I found later that this man, a Singaporean, was a Senior Japanese Police Officer. He was "Number two to the Japanese." This man was after me. He believed I had robbed him of a lovely hand-carved pistol at the beginning of the Japanese Occupation. It was Ibrahim who took the pistol with a promise of getting a permit. Luckily, this man did not nab me. I also learned that after the fall of Singapore, this man lured Malay soldiers to report to him with a promise

of \$5 a day and a free train ticket to return home to Peninsula Malaya. During the Japanese Occupation this same man was said to have been more brutal than the Kempeitai. Stories of his atrocities could bring tears to one's heart.

Dismissed from Malai Giyu Gun

One day, a Japanese Officer came to ask who among us, had drafted a fourteen-clause memo, which had, *inter alia*, demanded that the Japanese respect Malay customs and integrate all paramilitary bodies such as Hei Ho (Auxillary Servicemen) and Gun Po under Malai Giyu Gun. We replied spontaneously, "We did!" But the Japanese Officer did not believe us. He suspected I had written the 14 demands because of my educational background. Furthermore, I had a bad track record – I had demanded Japan declare Malaya's Independence at the beginning of the Japanese Invasion, almost shot a Japanese Officer, and had criticised Japanese soldiers' repulsive behaviour. I was thus dismissed from Malai Giyu Gun.

As I had doubts about Japanese attitude towards Malay desire for independence, I was happy to be getting out of the Malai Giyu Gun. I learned that it was because of Malay aspirations to be free that the Japanese refused to integrate Malai Giyu Gun, Giyu Tai, Hei Ho and Gun Po under one body. The Japanese knew they could not manipulate me. I would not debase myself by behaving like members of the Indian National Army (INA), by saluting all Japanese. It came to an absurd point where an INA Officer had to salute a Japanese private. Japan had rejected our demand that all paramilitary bodies be united under the Malai Giyu Gun. I knew Malai Giyu Gun would not achieve its objectives.⁴ On top of that the Japanese did not respect Malay taboos. I was not prepared to bow to the sun each morning and I disliked them using their feet to point to something. Finally, I did not agree with the intake of two former FMS Volunteer Force Officers into Malai Giyu Gun. I was later proven right.

Abdul Kadir Adabi also left the Malai Giyu Gun and returned to Kelantan. Although Ibrahim was in a room next to ours, he did not want to meet us both. Looks like we 'were once again made use of and then thrown by the wayside'. Nevertheless, we felt happy that we had, in our own little way, contributed our energy to our homeland and not for anyone else.

Notes

1. Malai Giyu Gun was a Japanese-sponsored Volunteer Army set up to assist the Japanese in the defence of Malaya. According to *Red Star over Malaya* by Dr Cheah

Boon Kheng, the first intake was in December 1943 and the first graduation was held in February 1944. They were trained like the Japanese.

2. Ahmad Boesatamam's statement read: "...One day after my release (from a Singapore prison) my friends and I were instructed to go to Singapore town to search for and to arrest Eurasians. As we were not armed, we did not dare fulfil the order."
3. While I was in Singapore, Hitori-san often visited my house in Lumut to play with my children. Unable to speak Malay, he brought the company's interpreter along.
4. My prediction came true. Malai Giyu Gun was reduced in number later. According to Malai Giyu Gun Lieutenant Osman bin Daim, it was reduced to just two companies of not more than 200 men. As such, how could Ibrahim have carried out contacts with Java, Sumatra and MPAJA to counter the Japanese as claimed by him through I.K. Agastya's writings?

Farming to Feed Hundreds (1943-45)

Having been dismissed from the Japanese Volunteer Army Malai Giyu Gun, I returned to my father's house in Matang once again. He had already fetched my wife Mariah from Lumut in a timber lorry. So, my uncomplaining wife and children moved, yet another time. Although Ibrahim Yaakub had, through KMM member Captain Abdul Karim Rashid, advised me to resume my job at the Japanese timber company in Lumut, I chose to be unemployed. I was certain the well-informed Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) guerrillas around Lumut had got wind of my Singapore Malai Giyu Gun sojourn and I still treasured my life.

Only months earlier I was earning a stable income. Now, I was unemployed again. Who was to be blamed? Was it my fate? Or was it God's plan? My struggling father, whose pension had ceased over two years ago, advised us to move to Batu 20, Batu Kurau, Perak where my forester brother Alli had secured a 20-acre plot of undeveloped land. I told my wife, "I cannot afford to eat tapioca any more. My legs are getting weaker by the day. At this rate, I may soon not be able to walk. Let us move to Batu 20 and plant rice." With my father's blessings, my wife, our three young children and I rode in a smelly bullock cart the 25 miles to Batu 20. We were accompanied only by our ragged bedrolls, pots and pans. In Batu 20, we set up home by the graceful River Ara in a battered hut on stilts. It had flimsy woven *bertam* walls, a leaking *attap* roof and split-bamboo floor strips tied with rattan, as nails were no longer available. The river was always swift and clear. After a heavy downpour, *baung*, *tilan*, *tengas*, *lampan* and other fish abounded. On many a day, I sat on a small stool by its bank to fish.

The very kind¹ villagers dropped in to get to know us and to give us some fruits and vegetables. As we were 'town-folks' many offered advice on planting and maintaining various crops. I received these tips without once mentioning that the person they were volunteering their advice to was a former agricultural lecturer. As my legs were weak, my wife, who

had until then no reason to work so hard, had to do almost all the farm work. But she did not once grumble. Womenfolk saw me as a heartless husband for letting my wife clear dense undergrowth in the scorching sun. They knew she had never had to ‘dirty her hands with manual work’. Wasn’t she the wife of a British Government servant? They pleaded, “Enchik Mustapha, please take your wife back to the town, where she belongs. We cannot bear to see her working so hard!” I responded by asking why they did not complain about their own situations, at the same time giving my reasons for moving into a farming community – my legs would weaken further if I continued to eat tapioca.

Little by little, my fragile health improved. This good fortune resulted from eating pancake made from flour mixed with vitamin B-rich rice-dust collected while pounding it, not reading newspapers, not minding world events, spending relaxing moments fishing, enjoying sincere friendships, light chatter with fellow farmers, and last but not least, satisfaction from helping the less fortunate.

I developed the two acres flat, 15 acres slope and three acres swampy farmland in stages. The flat tract was first cleared for fast-growing sugar cane. The more tricky slope was developed next for 3-month variety maize, 4-month variety hill rice and 5-month variety tapioca. Income from my first harvest was spent planting 4-month and 6-month variety rice.

A hefty first-time rice harvest was expected from such a fertile virgin plot, but 1,000 *gantangs* was far beyond my expectations. This was distributed among my farm-workers who were not only fellow villagers but also wives of Indian estate workers conscripted by the Japanese to construct the infamous Thailand-Burma Death Railway. As payment, each worker received a daily ration of two *katis* of tapioca, a pot of rice and some small-variety chilli. Chilli was a crucial antidote against leg swelling caused by too much tapioca intake. They also received some money, according to the going rate, for buying other necessities.

I became increasingly concerned as the number of workers kept growing as word got around. I did not have the heart to send teary-eyed women home empty-handed, yet if I took all in, there would not be enough tools to go around and insufficient tapioca for distribution. Luckily, the hungry newcomers were willing to accept another kind of produce – unripe bananas – which could be scraped and boiled with rice to give quantity, if not quality. Nevertheless, I decided to go by the villagers’ philosophy of “Let it be”, and kept receiving worker after worker.

Each morning at 10.00 am, my wife and three women workers would climb the slope with draw-hoes and machetes to dig up the tapioca, cut down banana trees and pluck chillies. Together with the women, my wife

would carry 40-*kati* loads of tapioca or bananas on her head to be unloaded in front of our hut. After weighing or measuring the produce, they were equally distributed, one heap for each worker. Later, at 1.00 pm, all workers would stop work, return to our hut, and collect their daily rations before walking back to their homes happy that there was food for one more day.

Before man could come up with a labour party, labour office, labour government and other labour organisations, Prophet Mohammed *s.a.w.* had already called out, "Pay your workers before the sweat on their bodies dries up." I dare challenge any labour organisation to propose a wiser philosophy.

My oldest girl, Ayesha, barely eight, was always by my side except when required to help with the housework. Whenever I was sick, she took over my role.

Sugar Cane Juice Stall

Using an old rubber-sheet presser, I sold sugar cane juice from cane planted in my farm and those bought from others. Biscuits were no longer available, so I sold peanut-based cookies and crackers made from tapioca flour. Adding some traditional Malay cakes, my stall was a big success. Sugar cane grown on flat land as well as on terraced slopes in my farm, was sold to Chinese sugar mills. There, the cane was pressed and its juice boiled into sugar to be sold in Taiping. After each harvest, Ayesha would accompany the commodity by sitting on top of the load in a bullock cart. She would return in the empty cart with a straw bag stuffed full of Japanese 'banana currency' ranging from \$24 to \$60.

Rice was Power

I started running a small makeshift stall by the River Ara wooden bridge, initially selling ripened bananas. It was doing so well that I paid workers with rice to build a stronger stall of woven *bertam* walls and roof. During the Japanese Occupation, anyone with rice had power. Like most commodities, meat was scarce, but the jungle was my veritable source of meat. Villagers living along jungle fringes sold me venison and hedgehog meat in exchange for rice. Venison was tasty, but hedgehog meat was more delicious. The villagers recommended hedgehog meat, considered 'heaty', as a cure for respiratory ailments. It was especially good for me, living in a hut whose *bertam* walls had gaping holes. I built three huts on a slope for several homeless people at no cost to them. I even helped

them plant vegetables in the compound around their huts. Again, the workers who built the huts were paid with rice.

One day, while chatting at Enchik Hamid's coffee-shop, someone mentioned that a particular widow had stayed indoors for weeks as she had run out of clothes.² When my wife heard this, she donated her own clothes, although she had few herself as we had left our home in Serdang without realising that my medical leave would be one that had already stretched for almost three years. My oldest girl took the clothes, some rice and an offer for the widow to work in our farm. This early training so influenced my daughter that she is now deeply involved in charity work.

Another day, I saw a villager in clothes made of coarse gunny-sack fabric. When we visited his house, his wife and children were similarly clothed. We donated some clothes and invited him to work as our *laksa asam* (thick rice-floor noodles in fish-soup gravy) vendor in the nearby town Batu Kurau. After the British returned to Malaya, this man Mat Hussin and wife Chik Timah lived pretty well; he was then employed as Special Constabulary in Tupai, Taiping. He never forgot our help and treated us with great reverence each time we visited his house. While he was poor in Batu 20, no one cared about him, just like the Malay saying, "Rust humiliates iron while poverty humiliates man."

What did I wear daily on my farm? I wore a volunteer hat,³ a button-less volunteer tunic whose sleeves had been shorn short, and long khaki pants cropped just below the knee. My pants had one hundred and one patches. The tears were initially mended with threads from pineapple leaves, but later, there were so many holes that they were simply glued together by rubber latex. These rubber latex mends, though very stiff, lasted longer. I wore shoes made from old rubber sheets. But wherever I went, day or night, my sharp machete was always tucked into my belt. There were easily 30 hoes, machetes, scythes and farming tools in my house, all bought with rice.

Those were years of grave hunger and deprivation. When Forest Officer Shafie came to exchange his living room furniture with rice, I refused, but he insisted, "You can use the furniture in your shop." We became good friends from that day on till he died. One night, Yeop Embin, an old man known for his collection of anecdotes, came to ask for some rice that he promised to pay for with maize. It sounded an acceptable deal until he asked for a 45-day grace period. He said with earnestness, "Enchik, you just wait at home. I will bring the maize to you in 45 days time." As I handed him the rice I told myself, "He is now taking the rice away, but has he planted the maize? If so, where? Should I not investigate

first?” While I was thinking these thoughts, he assured me, “Don’t worry Enchik, you can check me out from the people living near me.” Again, I decided to go by the villagers’ philosophy of “Let it be!”

With no radio, no TV and no newspapers, days turned into months very casually and calmly. On the 45th day since Yeop Embin’s verbal promise, he turned up at my doorstep to unload bunches of maize on to my yard. “Please count how many there are in this load. I will bring the rest.” This is a perfect example of honest-to-goodness Batu 20 villagers I knew during those trying years. These anecdotes were only three of countless stories of poor people pleading for help. Had I been a village moneylender, I would have raked in a lot of money. There were villagers who came to exchange their land grants with rice but I refused all except that of Haji Putih. After the war, I returned the grant and wrote off his loan. We were friends during and after the Occupation.

The ugliest common disease was leg yaws. I had one on my shin. Villagers attribute it to lack of sugar. This may have been true, but in my case, I had been infected after a poisonous tree stump had pierced my foot. Still, yaw-afflicted boys were saviours in the community. Once, when Japanese authorities demanded young men as conscript labour for the Death Railway, we Batu 20 folks met secretly with the not-so-poor Chinese and collected some money which was handed to our representatives, a group of young men with those awful gaping leg sores. We told them not to worry as they would definitely be returning home. True enough, Japanese doctors who examined them in Taiping turned them away. They then spent the money we gave them for a couple of fun-filled days in Taiping before returning to Batu 20. After that, the Japanese did not come to collect conscripts from our village.

The Chinese community in the area respected me greatly for one incident. A dresser, a health assistant, had told their leader Ah Soo, who was suffering from pneumonia, that I had M&B 693 tablets that would help him recover. Ah Soo’s son came for the tablets asking how much they cost. I told him, “If you want to pay for it, just pay one cent.” The Chinese respected me for respecting their belief that medicine must be paid for to be effective.

Whenever a villager came across a dead body, they would report the matter to me instead of the village headman. I would then ask, “How much rice for the mat? How much rice for digging the grave? How much rice for burying?” The body would then be buried according to Muslim rites. The mat was used as a shroud instead of scarce white cloth. Sometimes, when a mat was unavailable, banana leaves were used instead.

One afternoon, four skin-and-bones Malay escapees of the Death Railway turned up at our village. My stall by the bridge was their first stop. They were walking skeletons, with festering leg yaws and clothes that barely covered their private parts. They had crossed thick jungles and swift rivers to reach Ijok near the border before reaching our village. According to them, some fellow escapees were recaptured. One was devoured by a tiger in full sight of others. I instructed them to take a bath in the river, giving them ash from my firewood stove as soap, and a change of clothes. I then told my wife to cook rice for sixteen people. My oldest girl asked, "Why cook so much Father? There are only four of them!" I answered, "These are hungry men. One person can eat for four." After they were through with dinner, not a grain of rice was left in the pot.

Soon, two of these men who had gone to hell and back left us to continue their journey home. The other two decided to work on my farm. One of them left a little later, leaving Dahalan, a most industrious farmer who specialised in clearing work. The way he swung his razor sharp machete and chopped the branches was almost an art. A machete in the right hand could clear tracks of jungle with speed as every branch fell in the right position, ready to dry naturally and become most combustible. Dahalan feared to return to his hometown, Batu Gajah, where a misunderstanding between him and the village headman ended with him being surrendered to the Japanese as conscript labour. After a year on my farm, he too left for home. After the British returned to Malaya I heard he became a successful timber dealer. No wonder! He was so versatile with his machete. I made a mistake in not looking him up in 1946 shortly after I was released by the British. It would have been interesting to see the reaction of a new timber dealer towards a freed political detainee, once his erstwhile saviour and employer! Almost daily, illiterate or poorly educated Malays approached me for help to explain various letters, documents and land grants. I did not disappoint any of them.

Entertainment

I had already narrated the power rice yielded. What about tapioca sticks? Are they only for propagation? To be fair to the tapioca, let us talk about tapioca sticks. Batu 20 youths were tired of a boring existence of work and more work, eating tapioca and more tapioca, and looking at the same faces day after day. To go to Taiping, only 20 miles away, was difficult in times of no public transport and not many running vehicles. Therefore, "If we cannot go to Taiping, Taiping will come to Batu 20", they said.

After some discussions, we came up with an entertainment project for which they were willing to provide youthful energy, even if it meant pulling ploughs like water buffaloes. I contacted a Japanese company and negotiated. The young men then climbed my hill-farm to haul down bundles of tapioca sticks, fifty to each bundle. With the money gained from selling these tapioca sticks, I went to look for a *ronggeng* (a popular Malay dance, but like all Malay dances, no touching of any part of the body was allowed) manager to bring four *ronggeng* dance hostesses to Batu 20. A stage was erected in Batu 20 town.

I was surprised when these young men asked me for toddy, an intoxicating fermented drink from coconut palms. I did not think they knew drinks other than coffee or tea. It seemed they were interested in toddy more than their urban counterparts. They wanted me to order three Shanghai jars of toddy from an Indian man in Jelai, but I told them one was enough. They insisted, "One is not enough." I put my foot down, insisting one was indeed more than enough. When the toddy arrived, I slipped in some Chinese red-pigmented tobacco *anghun* and a potent juice from young roots of areca nut palms.

At 8.00 pm on the day of fun, donning their best clothes, the youths started to drink the toddy, gaining enough Dutch courage to dance on stage. The leader of the dancers, small-built Maimun, had a lovely voice. The youths drank, danced, drank more and danced some more. Before midnight, some went flat on their faces at the feet of their partners while others fell down walking off stage. Those still on their feet kept dancing and drinking until the early morning hours. Some went home to sleep at 2.00 am, but when they returned to find the dancing still going on at 5.00 am they continued where they left off. This went on until 10.00 am the next morning. Not a single policeman dared to question us although I had forgotten to gain a permit. I think many knew that I was a former Major and second-in-command of the Japanese Volunteer Army Malai Giyu Gun. Kind readers are invited to ask senior citizens of Batu 20 about this marathon *ronggeng* that I helped organise. It broke all records.

Potpourri

I dabbled in all kinds of business during the Japanese Occupation, just like the Chinese who sold things near the main thoroughfare by the rice fields. But I only bought produce to be sold to Malays and Punjabis. For example, I bought maize that my wife dried in the sun to be later sold as flour to Punjabis for making *chapati* pancakes. I bought young chicks and fattened them either for sale or as food.

I also sold rice to bus-workers who would then sell it in Taiping. When the Occupation was over, I learned that the price they sold in the black market was way beyond the price I had sold the rice for. Various techniques and tactics were employed by black market rice dealers to avoid arrest. One black market rice dealer was named ‘Awang Gulung’ because he liked to roll up his sarong until the bunched up sarong at his waist was huge. He hid his money and tobacco in the rolled sarong. He never wore a shirt. Another dealer was ‘Awang Kotei’ from Pantai Besar, two miles from Batu 20, who only transported rice at night. Yet another was nicknamed ‘Ibrahim Semota’ for he was never seen without a *semota*, a kind of headgear worn by Malays living on the East Coast of Malaya. They were all closely watched by informer ‘Lebai Kocho’, but not one was arrested.

All bicycles had no rubber tyres. Therefore rice dealers found that by the time they reached the homes of potential buyers, the rice would appear to be less. So, they usually stopped just before reaching the buyer’s house and ran through the rice with their fingers, to give it more bulk. One lesson to be learned was not to buy *haruan* fish. It has a wide mouth. Sellers usually inserted stones into the fish to make them heavier.

One day, I noticed a long line of older women walking upriver with baskets in their hands. I asked where they were heading for. “It was heavy lightning last night!” they answered. I asked further, “So?” Their response, “So, there is bound to be plenty of mushrooms! We are going for them.” How true. Science teaches us that thousands of kilowatts of electric energy generated by lightning make mushrooms sprout faster. On another day, I saw several men with fishing rods walking down-river in rows. Just a few days ago it was the women walking in single file, now it was the men. I found out that they were going to fish for *tengas* because the river water had ebbed and the fish had gone down-river. A few days further along, I saw a group of men going upriver with sharp knives in their hands. They were apparently looking for *rattan* as tethers for their water buffaloes. The ploughing season had arrived. All my questions were answered, but when I asked them when they decided to get together and do all those things, they could not answer.

The best breakfast then and perhaps now was glutinous rice dipped in cane syrup. Boiled tapioca in boiling cane syrup was just as delicious.

During the Occupation, when Malaya was upside down, there was a story of a man who invited Perak’s Sultan Abdul Aziz to descend from his throne, but nothing happened to the man. An old religious man who sold medicated massage oil became a *kocho*, one who could arrest others. Many became victims of this man but during the Bintang Tiga interregnum

(for less than a month between the Japanese surrender in Tokyo in mid-August 1945 and British colonial re-occupation when the ‘three-star’ communist-led Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army was ascendant in much of the country, but often in conflict with the Guomindang-led ‘one-star’ guerrillas), he disappeared into thin air. A Police Sergeant was known to summon villagers to the station for questioning on Islamic issues. Was he given the power by the Japanese Chief Police Officer, or did he act on his own?

Another feature of Japanese Occupation was the *Jikeidan*⁴ (Voluntary Vigilance Corps for Self-Preservation and Self-Protection), with members aged between 16 and 40, who patrolled villages at night. I lost sugar cane and tapioca most nights, but since it was a time when many were hungry, I bear no grudge against them.

Mustapha’s Hill

After my release from the Batu Gajah Prison in 1946, I was ordered to vacate my hill-farm which had supported my family and many villagers during the Occupation and while I was imprisoned. I left many flourishing tapioca, banana, sugar cane and fruit trees. What was my crime? Others were allowed to stay on until today. This hill-farm, named Che Mustapha’s Hill by the people, is now the site of the government’s Malaysian Rubber Development Corporation (MARDEC) for Batu Kurau district.

Goodbye my farm,
goodbye my hill,
goodbye my world,
and all the spirits living there.

Notes

1. I cannot forget their kindness, but not many people whom I knew are still alive.
2. Kampung folk then had few clothes – one set for special ceremonies; one for house wear and two for working in. Unable to replace them for more than three years, almost nothing was left.
3. These legacies of my Volunteer Force days had already been donated to a brother in Matang, but during the Japanese Occupation, I had to retrieve them for my farming chores.
4. *Jikeidan* (Voluntary Vigilance Corps for Self-Preservation and Self-Protection) patrolled areas divided into sections. Armed with a stick and a whistle, they were on duty about three times each month, to arrest undesirable elements, suspicious outsiders and communist elements.

KRIS (July-August 1945): Drafting a Constitution for an Independent Malaya

In July 1945, rumours spread from mouth to mouth of severe Japanese defeats in several arenas, especially in the Pacific theatre. These developments jolted the Japanese into giving more thoughts towards winning the hearts and minds of Malays in the five Malay states still intact. This attitudinal change in approach led to the formation of Hodosho (Help-and-Guide People Office) and KRIS (Special Strength of the People). Before I describe my role and contribution to the two bodies, let me quote a few observations made by Professor Yoichi Itagaki¹ in his article “Some Aspects of Japanese Policy for Malaya under the Occupation, with Special Reference to Nationalism”, to be followed by my own comments as a Malay nationalist involved in both Hodosho and KRIS. According to Prof. Itagaki, on 3 July 1945 the Japanese Administration set up Hodosho with headquarters in Taiping. It was “for all communities” and “the duty of Hodosho was, above all, to become humble servants of the public and promoters of public benefits in Malaya.” Hodosho branches soon spread to other parts of the nation.

Prof. Itagaki wrote that KRIS was derived from the Malay initials *Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa*, literally meaning Special Strength of the People or All Out Effort of the People.² KRIS was a direct outcome of the “Second Singapore Conference of Secretary-Generals of the Military Administrations of Java, Sumatra, Celebes and Malaya on July 29, 1945. The aim of the conference was to discuss the problem of ‘Quick Independence of Indonesia’ and related issues. Military Administration of Malaya had to take a necessary step for the unavoidable political repercussions of Indonesian Independence upon the Malays in Malaya, in view of the fact that they highly rejoiced when Malaya and Sumatra were treated as a unit area of Military Administration immediately after the Japanese Occupation.”

My opinion on the unification of Malaya and Sumatra is that some Malays may have rejoiced, but to me and my KMM friends, Japanese

action was unwarranted, even as a temporary measure to facilitate smoother administration. As a Malay nationalist, I was happy with what Allah had bestowed on the Malays, *Tanah Melayu* (The Malay Land), and did not hanker to become a new colonial power. What would happen to Indonesia minus its big island Sumatra? How about Java with its more than one hundred million people?

Prof. Itagaki commented that “Furthermore, on the occasion of the declaration of future independence for Indonesia made by Prime Minister Koiso on September 7, 1944, the Malays of Singapore attempted to hold celebration meetings and to form an Indonesian Association, which, however, was not permitted by the Japanese Authority.” My comment: There was not a single difference between Singapore Malays and Peninsular Malays who came from the same stock, except that Singapore Malays still spoke Malay with an Indonesian accent and continued to maintain ties with their motherland.

Prof. Itagaki continued, “What was more important might have been the fact that the desperate decrease in Malay population after the cession of four northern Malay States (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu) to Thailand in October 1943, the increasing difficulties in living conditions due to the rising prices, and the accumulation of discontent and disappointment in the Japanese Military Administration, were causing it to lose the support of Malays.” The Japanese hoped to galvanise Malays to oppose the Allied Forces when they invaded Malaya, as they expected. My comment: Japanese reading of Malay ‘disappointments and discontents’ could not be more accurate. But it was too late.

What Other People Say About Me

I played an active role in KRIS and in drafting the Independent Malaya Constitution in July and August 1945. Before I relate relevant events, let me quote what other people say about me, so you, kind reader, will know my efforts to gain independence for my beloved motherland.

On 24 August 1973, historian Dr Anthony Reid of the Australian National University interviewed Prof. Itagaki (then with Hitotsubashi University) on KRIS. An excerpt of Dr Reid’s letter to history researcher Halinah Bhamadaj reads:

Major General Umezu, then Somubucho (Chief) of the Malaya-Sumatra Military Administration approached Prof. Yoichi Itagaki, as about the only person with some knowledge about (Malaya) nationalism, to do something about encouraging Malay nationalism. Itagaki therefore went from his Kuala Lumpur base down to Singapore to see Ibrahim Yaakub, who was still active

in his role as Malai Giyu Gun leader there. Ibrahim's Japanese boss agreed to release him for the new task, since he had said the Malai Giyu Gun had no military significance anyway. That evening Itagaki met Ibrahim and about ten of his mates and proposed this new movement for Malaya Merdeka (Independence). At that meeting the name KRIS was already decided by Ibrahim, to mean Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa (literally Special Strength of the People), i.e. not Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung or Union of Peninsular Indonesians as it apparently became after the surrender.

According to Prof. Itagaki, at the meeting Ibrahim insisted that KRIS would be useless without my co-operation. Ibrahim had said, "We cannot start anything without Mustapha Hussain, the vice chairman of KMM. If there is no agreement from Mustapha, there is no hope of success. To mobilise 800 comrades, his support is indispensable. To make the matter worse, he has been insisting that he would not co-operate with the Japanese since the incident in which he was kicked and slapped."³

I appreciate Ibrahim's assessment of my leadership, but two years after that interview, in a letter dated 20 May 1975, his feelings for me had deteriorated sharply. The acerbic 14-page letter was his reaction to my decision to write KMM history as I knew it, at the request of Malaysian history students and researchers. Let me explain the claim that a Kempeitai officer had kicked and slapped me. The truth has been told earlier – I almost shot dead a Japanese Officer who insulted the Malays by insisting that Malays were only fit to be policemen and drivers. I don't know how this story was twisted because Ibrahim himself witnessed the grim incident. After that near death tragedy, on the instructions of Major Fujiwara, Chief Interpreter Otaguro advised me to stay away from the Japanese. He had said with deep regret that my nationalistic fire was in conflict with Japanese militarist ambitions. He then reminded me, "Once, in Ipoh, we have forgiven you!" referring to the episode where I complained to General Itagaki of some Japanese soldiers' despicable behaviour.

Otaguro asked me to see Ibrahim Yaakub to accept some money Ibrahim had received for about 100 KMM members. But I was given nothing. The next day, I left Singapore empty-handed, just like many other KMM members (Johar bin Kerong, Ahmad Boestamam and Mohd Mustafa bin Ali) did earlier. Where did the money, about \$100,000 go?

According to Reid, Prof. Itagaki asserted, "Mustapha was the real organising skill behind Ibrahim's charisma, the Hatta to Soekarno combination. Whether it was for this reason that he was indispensable, or a more tactical consideration of ensuring that the new movement was more credibly nationalistic, is not clear to Itagaki. In any case Ibrahim went to visit Mustapha for three days (in which time Itagaki suspects he might

have slipped over the border to consult people in Kedah too, though he claimed it took this time to persuade Mustapha) and then they all went to ask Umezu what his intentions were.”⁴ Prof. Itagaki’s comments on my leadership are most encouraging, but I want to state very clearly that the person who coaxed me to participate in KRIS was Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmi, and not Ibrahim. The KMM President appeared in Taiping only in the second week of August 1945 while KRIS had already been born in July.

According to Prof. Itagaki, at his own request, Major General Umezu, who shared his sympathies for the nationalist movement, agreed to do all he could to persuade me. Itagaki still remembers my meeting with Major General Umezu. He had written that I had begun the meeting sceptically and had asked many questions.

But Major General Umezu had won Mustapha round by disarmingly saying, “I wish to speak honestly with you all today. Our policy towards the Malay nationalist movement all this while has been wrong. We realise this too late. We must change our policy. We should now do our best to respond to your nationalistic desire. Although the war is still on, we must do our best to implement our policy.”

Prof. Itagaki, who was interpreting, recalls that after Major General Umezu admitted the weaknesses of the Japanese, he noticed a sudden transformation in Mustapha’s demeanour. He was smiling. Later, Mustapha told Itagaki he had been impressed by Major General Umezu’s sincerity, especially his admission of the Japanese mistake. This, he claimed, few Japanese would ever do. When the group returned to Itagaki’s residence, they became exuberant and began dancing and singing. Tears welled up in Mustapha’s eyes.⁵

Prof. Itagaki continued that everyone agreed to work for Independence through KRIS and after the second meeting, KMM leaders dispersed around Malaya to organise regional groups. “The real purpose of Major General Umezu, I stressed, was to make of these KMM type potential agents of the Japanese Army in Malay areas, after the expected Allied counter attack in Malaya. Independence was not really practical. The KMM group was the one used for this purpose because it was the only political party in Malaya.”⁶

As part of Japanese efforts to support Malaya’s independence through Hodoshō or KRIS, Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) was invited to cooperate. He was assigned by Dr Burhanuddin to organise Malay youths in the east coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu, so that if the Japanese were defeated, the Malays, KMM supporters, would carry arms against the Allied Forces in defending Malaya’s Independence.

Equipped with a little money and several documents, Ishak left for Padang Besar, and then to Yala, Haadyai, Golok, Rantau Panjang and back

to Kota Bharu in Kelantan. He met KMM members Abdul Kadir Adabi in Kuala Terengganu, Ibrahim Fikri and Datuk Wan Daud before returning to his *kampung* near Temerloh. He was disappointed that all efforts to reactivate his friends were a dismal failure. I was not surprised with the negative outcome. I had already told Major General Umezu and Prof. Itagaki in Taiping that everything was too late. What were we to defend? A fish (Malaya) that belonged to the Malays had been cut into two, with one part already presented to the Siamese on a silver platter.

My Experience of Hodosho and KRIS

After several meetings, Hodosho was formed on 3 July 1945. Then a farmer in remote Batu 20, I was summoned to Taiping by the Japanese authorities without any explanation. Only the venue was disclosed.

In my tattered clothes and wearing a pair of shoes made from rubber sheets, I arrived in Taiping like 'a deer that had strayed into a village'. I had travelled in a coal-powered timber lorry. I was nervous. It was only days earlier that a Japanese timber *Kumiai*⁷ chief accused me of blocking his path by felling a tree near my house. He told villagers forced to help remove the tree that I had sabotaged the Japanese and should be punished. Luckily, a villager rushed to warn me and I ran uphill to hide. Just before that, a lorry-load of Japanese soldiers had raided a coffee-shop where I was, but I managed to escape and hide in some undergrowth. Four people were taken to Taiping.

And just before that, a group of rattan *Kumiai* members had taken me to a house where I witnessed them immersed in a strange ritual. There, I saw a Japanese leader giving a speech while his followers, all robed in black and wearing black headbands, sat cross-legged with their heads low in a bow. None dared to speak or look up. Was this the Black Dragon Society? Till today, I do not know. I also did not know how they knew how to contact me and why I was taken there with them? I did not look for them. They came to look for me. And I received nothing from them.

Then, out of the blue, in came a group of six rather tall Japanese, with oval-shaped faces and strong noses, very unlike the typically short and round-faced Japanese soldiers. They rented a big house from a Malay. They too came to see me and tried to win my heart by offering me rice (I had plenty already), sugar (I had plenty of cane sugar) and Vitamin-B pills (I made pancake with vitamin-rich rice-dust). They carried with them a dried fish, almost as big as a desk, perhaps as food supply. They asked me for routes into the jungle. Did I know anyone from the jungle? Did I

know any MCP (Malayan Communist Party) member? Could I introduce them to MCP leaders? All these questions pointed to one thing – the Allied Forces were on their way and these Japanese were trying to gain communist help to fight their enemy from the jungle. In my heart, I said, “Should this happen, Malays would be trapped in between the two forces. Who would help them out of this predicament?”

I recalled an incident where I had experienced Japanese aggression and brutality. I hope there are Japanese reading this, so they will come to realise some things. After returning from Singapore, I bought an Austin 8 car by selling my wife’s jewellery to replace my former car that had earlier been commandeered by the Japanese from under my father’s house. I was then advancing south with Fujiwara Kikan. My brother, who tried to explain why I had gone, almost got chopped up. My mother, tired and worried about my family hiding in the jungle, fainted and fell ill. She died several months later.

I took the 1941 model car to a Malay mechanic to convert the engine to one that could use fuel from rubber. While I was there, a Kempeitai snatched my car keys accusing me as an ungrateful Malay for not thanking the Japanese by surrendering my car. “Where have you been hiding this car? Why did you not give it to the Japanese?” I responded, “I had just bought this car. My earlier car was already commandeered by the Japanese.” But the Kempeitai struck me in the face. In the fight that ensued, I tried to press the button that would release his samurai sword, but failed. He hit me again and again. He also kicked me.

Enraged as never before, I wrestled with him and kept going until I heard a Malay woman from an upstairs window of The Larut Motors, near Taiping’s old mosque, shouted, “Enchik, be patient, do not fight! Just think of your children who are waiting for you at home!” On hearing that, I stopped fighting. Had I not thought of my wife and children, I might have fought till death.⁸ So, it should not surprise anyone that I no longer wished to work with the Japanese, as Ibrahim has maintained in many of his statements? Not one of my friends took the trouble to know how I was! Do you still wonder why I had kept my mouth shut for over thirty years?

Back to Hodoshō and KRIS. Travelling to Taiping that day to meet the Japanese who had summoned me, my heart was thumping hard. With one hundred and one questions in my head, I arrived at the pre-determined building. Among the five groups of Japanese I mentioned earlier, which group would be waiting for me in Taiping? Which group had ‘invited’ me? Would I ever see my wife and children again? How would my wife run the farm all on her own?

For a long time, I had been trying to stay away from the Japanese. Many Malays knew I had been a Major with the Japanese Volunteer Army Malai Giyu Gun. Should they connect my link, from KMM to the Malai Giyu Gun and then to the Japanese staying in Batu 20, they may very well assume I was a 'Japanese informer' planted among Batu 20 folks to monitor anti-Japanese MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army) guerrillas. I was worried my innocent family might be killed.

I was convinced that my security and wellbeing in Batu 20 depended on my honesty, generosity and compassion for fellow villagers. I knew I was living in an MPAJA stronghold, but I was never contacted by them. The one person who often asked me about many things was a Malay boy from Kampung Gudang, two miles from my hut. I heard he was often missing from his village. Another reason why I suspected him was his ability to discuss advanced politics, including that of international labour movements. How would a village boy know such high politics?

Maybe he had read Indonesian political books. But I am sure he was the one who informed his comrades that I was no threat to them. One day he asked me, "Why did the Japanese look for you, Enchik Mustapha?" I told him I didn't know them, other than that they were renting a house nearby. I happened to come across them while walking towards the river to fish. That was all. He continued, "Why are the Japanese living here?" I said I did not know the answer, and suggested he investigate the matter himself. Later, when I left my farm in 1946 after my release from the Batu Gajah Prison, the boy bade me a warm goodbye. When the British declared Malayan Emergency in 1948, I heard this boy, now a gregarious young man, disappeared into the jungle.

When I reached the appointed venue in Taiping, I was led into an office where I saw a Japanese Officer and Dr Burhanuddin sitting separately. The Japanese Officer received me very graciously, as if I was his long lost friend. What a relief it was when my eyes fell on Dr Burhanuddin, whom I had not seen for a long time. Dr Burhanuddin was then employed by the Japanese as an advisor on Islam and Malay customs. The Japanese Officer then welcomed me to sit down and left us. Dr Burhanuddin started his conversation with, "Just look at the Japanese. Not a single one of their words can be taken seriously. Please help me!" He then started to tell me about an effort to draft the Independent Malaya Constitution through a new body, KRIS. My heart whispered, "Of what is left of Malaya!" He next explained, at length, the aims of KRIS. I merely kept quiet. I had been totally disillusioned with the Japanese.⁹ I was not on their payroll and I had not received any assistance whatsoever. In short, I owed them nothing. I knew the Japanese were in despair.

According to the 'jungle radio', their troops were already withdrawn from Burma. Why else did they need me? I suspected strong winds of change would soon be upon us.

Later in the afternoon, I left Dr Burhanuddin to return to my farm to think about his invitation, promising to return with my decision. To coax me, Dr Burhanuddin came to my farm and stayed overnight. In our discussions, he lamented that he found it increasingly more difficult to work with the Japanese because some of their proposals were in conflict with Islam. For example, the Japanese instructed him to suggest to the Malay Rulers a most serious issue, that Muslims should do away with the five daily prayers and only perform one mass prayer on Fridays. This troubled him deeply. I advised him to not get involved in such a serious religious issue.

The next morning, in the midst of Dr Burhanuddin's dawn prayer, as he was reading the essential dawn prayer *qunut* verses, I heard him sobbing his heart out like a child pleading for something from his father. I was completely moved. After he left my hut with treasures from my farm, including maize and rice, I strolled down the slope to the Ara River to think about Dr Burhanuddin's appeal to me to participate in KRIS.

After very deep thought, I decided to give the Japanese another chance. Who knows, this time they may be sincere and Malaya will be a sovereign and independent nation. I had to do something to save my motherland, already sliced into two like a fish. Can I return those parts 'stolen' by the Siamese to our lap? Although we still have its fleshy body and tail, it is not all ours. Furthermore, how can a fish thrive without its breathing organs, the gills? What about the people in the four states already surrendered? What is Ibrahim's opinion on this? I had already heatedly discussed this session with him. Who was responsible for it?

Another reason for my decision was that Dr Burhanuddin was an old friend who had appealed, "Please help me, Mustapha!" I did not have the heart to let him down. His sobs while performing the dawn prayer touched me so. Furthermore, it was Ibrahim and I who had introduced Dr Burhanuddin to the Japanese after the fall of Singapore and it was also we who suggested he be employed as advisor on Islam and Malay customs.

Last but not least, Dr Burhanuddin was not conversant enough in English to draft a constitution. I could not help recalling the wisdom of an Aceh Ruler who in 1883 advised my granduncle Datuk Panglima Nakhoda Taruna, about Western powers and their wisdom with words. She had said, "Be careful Datuk, these westerners are very clever with words. One wrong word may cost you a territory while a word well said

may gain you two territories.” I was afraid something undesirable might repeat itself in the twentieth century, jeopardising the future of the Malays. From nine states, Malaya only had five left. Let us make sure nothing happens to the five. With those thoughts in mind, I rushed to Taiping to attend a very important meeting with Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir, Hanif Sulaiman and several others whose names I cannot recall.

Hodosho Central in Taiping, July 1945

Hodosho was first located on 3 July 1945 at the Taiping Nurses Hostel, but was later moved to the third floor of St George’s Institution. There are many events I must narrate on the formation of Hodosho and KRIS. I had argued with many Japanese Officers, including Major General Umezu and Prof. Itagaki, about the matter. This was the meeting that Prof. Itagaki recorded in great detail in *Azia tonu Taiwa*. At the meeting, I had questioned the purpose of setting up Hodosho, which was merely ‘a reading room’ as time was running out. The Japanese had granted Burma its independence in 1943, followed by the Philippines. Malaya had also co-operated with the Japanese troops like Burma, but why was Malaya not treated the same? I ended my small speech with, “Why not declare Malaya’s Independence here and now? Instead of just talk, which is a waste of precious time. We don’t have that much time!”

The Japanese Officers, including Major General Umezu, said they could not possibly grant Malays Independence just like that. What would others say if Malays gained Independence without a struggle? “Furthermore, the Malays are not prepared to fight for Independence,” Major General Umezu claimed. At this insult, I raised my voice and asked him to retract the words ‘not prepared’. I invited them to study Malay history. I reminded the Japanese that “You are lucky Admiral Perry only visited your country to look around, or else, you too would have been colonised, like us!” I continued, “It is our ancestors, the Malay ancestors, who sailed up the Manila estuary and founded Manila. It was our ancestors who sailed to Kyushu Island to open up settlements. That is why the Japanese from Kyushu Island are not so fair and have body hairs like Malays. That is why Kyushu Japanese are of my colour and have body hair like I do.”

Hearing my tone of voice, a Kyushu Japanese came forward with a grin, saying “*Ona agi*” (the same), pointing to his skin. All the Japanese in the room began to examine their arms and started to compare skin tones. One of them walked to a bookcase and referred the matter to a French volume and found my claim to be true. They then apologised, “*Gomen Kudasai*” repeatedly. It was only then that Major General Umezu

admitted that Japanese policies, as practised by Japanese leaders before him, were wrong. But he still insisted that “Independence will be discussed shortly.”

I asked, “What? Shortly? Where have we the time? If it is not discussed now, I am leaving this place!” I could afford to say that as I was not on their payroll and I knew they were in deep trouble after a severe thrashing in Burma. Only then would Major General Umezu discuss Independence for Malaya. But he asked, “Why had the KMM been silent on this?” I replied, “That is not true! In Kuala Lumpur, in January 1942, while the war was raging, I and other KMM members had demanded Japan proclaim Malaya’s Independence. But you turned us down. Now you are saying the Malays are not prepared to struggle for it? Now that time is running out, you want to discuss about it!” Umezu was shocked to hear this. He said the Japanese did not make any political negotiations with Ibrahim. Major General Umezu then said, “Malays must fight for their Independence. They must lay the claim with a struggle or launch a coup. What would other world bodies say should Japan hand the Malays their Independence on a silver platter?”

The only path left for KMM was therefore to support the KRIS¹⁰ movement, declare Malaya’s Independence and then defend it. “We, the Japanese, will help the Malays defend their nation’s Independence as an ally”, said Major General Umezu. I told him that I had predicted this situation since 1942. That was why on my way home to Matang after the capitulation of Singapore, I stopped in Ipoh where I took A. Talib bin Haji Ahmad, leader of PPMP (Perak Malay Youth Association), to meet the Japanese Governor for Perak. We proposed collecting and training Malays, including soldiers and volunteers, in a body to be named Pembela Tanah Air (PETA) (Defenders of the Motherland) for the defence of Malaya whenever the need arose.

The Governor had shot down our idea as he detected the Malays’ desire for Independence. As a consequence, all our members then staying in the Nurses Hostel in Ipoh were chased out like dogs. If the Japanese wanted the building, they should do it tactfully, because these members had co-operated with them. Their support might be needed again some day. “Was my prediction not true? I don’t think we can count on the support of the Malays around Ipoh any more,” I told Major General Umezu.

In discussing KRIS activities at that critical point of time, the Japanese were willing to provide two lorry-loads of weapons if we were ready to accept them. I turned towards the Malays present at the meeting to ask, “Are you all very clear on our responsibilities? Are you all willing

to accept and hide weapons in Gunung Semanggul and Gunung Pondok caves near Padang Rengas?" None reflected joy. All were gloomy-faced and uncertain.

That night, we were taken to Major General Umezu's house along Jalan Swettenham where we were feted.¹¹ I tasted something new, something fried, a taste difficult to describe. It turned out to be fried salted skin of the humble tapioca. Was this an effort to demonstrate Major General Umezu's sacrifices for the 'Asia for the Asians' slogan? I don't know. In subsequent meetings, Chinese and Indian representatives were no longer present. Ustaz Abu Bakar, preoccupied with his little mosque, opened his mouth to request for cement, *attap* roofing and cloth from the Japanese, some of which they did provide.

Dr Burhanuddin and I slogged day and night to draft an Independent Malaya Constitution and other materials related to KRIS. As we worked, we thought of Ibrahim and thus approached Major General Umezu to have him summoned. However, Major General Umezu replied that it was not necessary for Ibrahim to lead this project. As KMM vice president, I could do so. He also said it was difficult to contact Ibrahim. But we insisted, if not for anything, to show to the Japanese that just as Soekarno was the leader of the Indonesian people, Ibrahim was the leader of the people of Malaya. Not long after, Ibrahim arrived in Taiping, accompanied by a handsome adjutant, Lt Osman Daim from the Malai Giyu Gun.

On 11 August, Hodosho officers took Ibrahim and Dr Burhanuddin to Penang to meet the Japanese Submarine Flotilla Commodore responsible for Penang Radio Station, whose permission was vital in the proclamation of Independent Malaya. I was told he was a communist and should gladly co-operate. He openly welcomed the use of Penang radio station and would work hard towards the materialisation of an Independent Malaya declaration on 17 August, not in Jakarta, as claimed later. I did not go to Penang with them as I was busy drafting the Independent Malaya Constitution and KRIS Congress working papers. It was already decided in Taiping that the KRIS Congress would be held at the Kuala Lumpur Station Hotel.

On 12 August, I was invited by the Japanese Officers to go to Taiping aerodrome with Ibrahim to meet the legendary President Soekarno and his entourage that included Dr Mohd Hatta, but I had to turn the offer down as my legs were in great pain. Descending three flights of stairs was daunting. I had turned down a golden opportunity, which I regret to this day. Soekarno stopped over in Taiping on his way home to Indonesia, after meeting Field Marshall Count Terauchi, Supreme Commander of Japanese Forces in Southeast Asia, in Saigon. Although Ibrahim liked to

think otherwise, his meeting with Soekarno was by chance, as confirmed by Prof. Itagaki who was present. "On August 12, 1945 Ibrahim met by chance Ir Soekarno and Dr Hatta who were flying from Saigon to Djakarta at the Taiping aerodrome and was encouraged by them."¹² Lt Osman Daim, adjutant and secretary to Ibrahim, wrote, "Rumours were flying that the Japanese would soon surrender; Soekarno and his friends were in Taiping to meet with Japanese leaders. Enchik Ibrahim Yaakub took this opportunity to meet the great leader."

My deduction: Soekarno met Field Marshall Count Terauchi, Supreme Commander of Japanese Forces in Southeast Asia in Saigon to collect the Instrument of Independence for Indonesia. He had to stop over in Taiping so that Major General Umezu could act on the document, officially returning Sumatra to Indonesia. Only after that could Soekarno declare Indonesia's (plus Sumatra's) Independence. There was no suggestion that Malaya be integrated with Indonesia. Dr Gouse, an Indonesian living in Singapore, tried to celebrate the news of Japanese granting of independence to Indonesia, but was forbidden to do so. He was almost thrashed by the Kempeitai, who warned, "That is in Indonesia. Nothing to do with Singapore."

I would like to reiterate that there was no proposal that Malaya be integrated with Indonesia. What logic would the Japanese go by to include British North Borneo Territories into an Independent Indonesia? They were knowledgeable in international laws. Soekarno was an astute politician who understood international procedures and laws. He had told Ibrahim later on in Indonesia, "Do exactly like Abdul Karim (the Algerian leader) did. One thing at a time," which was to let Indonesia gain its independence first before Malaya followed suit.

May I add that the Japanese proposal of an Independent Malaya Constitution, lauded by many as the 'Taiping Charter', was to contain only five Malay States. The lost four (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu) would remain in Siamese grip. The Straits Settlements of Singapore, Melaka, Penang, Province Wellesley and the British North Borneo territories would be Japanese colonies indefinitely. The Japanese had cleverly left the issue of a divided Malaya and North Borneo till the very last minute. Upon discovery of this manipulation, I protested violently and threatened to pull out of the project, but my action was not supported by Ibrahim and Dr Burhanuddin, who were working for the Japanese Military Administration and had no choice but to obey all the way. I felt as if I was performing the last rites on a dead Malaya after it had been sliced and cut, instead of a blessing ceremony for a Malaya that was once again full-bodied and complete.

Work pressure and much climbing of stairs affected my muscles and nerves so badly that KMM member Hanif Sulaiman had to massage me while Lt Osman Daim had to walk on my body to relieve the pain.¹³ I am proud that I gave my all for the sake of my motherland.

In the Independent Malaya Constitution and KRIS Congress working papers Dr Burhanuddin and I drafted in a secret room in St George's Institution in Taiping, not a sentence mentioned that Independent Malaya would be declared simultaneously with Indonesia. The date 17 August was no doubt the same, but Malaya would declare independence independently through Penang Radio Station. Ibrahim would proclaim it in Malay, with me announcing the sacred words in English.

I want to repeat that the objective of KRIS was not to integrate Malaya with Indonesia but just to be under one union with each having its own separate decision-making bodies. This was different from statements made by Ibrahim who wanted Malaya and Indonesia to be administered by one body. I daresay all this in contrary because it was Dr Burhanuddin and I who slogged in July and August preparing working papers for the KRIS Congress and an Independent Malaya Constitution. I have remained a loyal and faithful friend of Ibrahim for thirty years, from 1945-75, until the day I received that acerbic 14-paged letter accusing me of arresting, detaining and torturing several Malays during the war in Malaya. He knew full well who was responsible for this deplorable action.

While many in Malaya were making claims to be the first Malays to demand Malaya's Independence, I sent a photograph of Ibrahim in his Malai Giyu Gun Lieutenant Colonel outfit to Ahmad Boestamam to be published in *Forum*, but the photo was never returned. This photo, smuggled into Malaya through Pulau Langkawi soon after my release from Batu Gajah Prison in 1946, was hidden in the attic of Osman Bakery, my father's friend's shop. I was afraid of being re-arrested should the British ransack my house.

Ibrahim Yaakub Departs, 13 August 1945

A day or two after Soekarno made his brief stopover in Taiping, I invited Ibrahim to lunch in my Batu 20 hut. As we sat down cross-legged on a mat eating curried mouse-deer meat, we exchanged thoughts and views on world events. As my legs were troubling me, it was decided that my name be struck off the KRIS Congress delegation to Kuala Lumpur.

After lunch, as we descended my hut's steps, made from round tree trunks, we saw a huge American B-29 flying boldly while a Japanese aircraft pretended to be hunting it down. It looked just like a puny sparrow

trying to chase after a mighty eagle. We knew it to be a sign of Japanese imminent surrender, and we despaired that Malaya was not yet Independent. Under the grey shadow of the aircraft, Ibrahim said dejectedly, "I expect the Japanese to surrender soon. Come with me. Let us flee to Indonesia." I replied, "If you want to escape, do so. I prefer to be here." We spoke some more and I added, "Ibrahim, you must continue with our fight from Indonesia." His last words to me were, "If there are questions, say that I am a responsible person." I promised Ibrahim that I would be responsible for KMM members even if I were 'burnt to ash'. We then shook hands. Ibrahim walked briskly towards his car with me walking limply to my old hut. We have not met since.

Ibrahim left me thinking it would be a short separation. I was left alone to face three groups of enemies: Force 136 Malay guerrillas under a British Officer whom I knew were active in the Batu Kurau district, the Bintang Tiga (Three Stars or communist-led) guerrillas who were beginning to reveal their deadly claws, and finally, British troops who would return soon. Among the three, which one would kill me first?

In *Azia tono Taiwa*, Prof. Itagaki narrated that after the Japanese surrender was made public on 15 August, he broke the news to Ibrahim who was travelling with him in a car to Kuala Lumpur. Ibrahim then asked Itagaki, "Please ask Somubucho (Chief Military Officer) in Singapore to provide me with a plane. I want to escape to Java." The request was made on 15 August before the KRIS Congress was convened. In fact, Ibrahim was en route to Kuala Lumpur for the Congress. This confirms that Ibrahim had plans to migrate to Indonesia before the KRIS Congress, which incidentally could not be held. This is contradictory to his claim that it was the KRIS Congress that proposed his departure to Indonesia.

Ibrahim's Departure for Indonesia

I have narrated matters related to KRIS till the 13th of August, such as proclamation plans, the KRIS Congress and other matters to be discussed in Kuala Lumpur on 15 August. I was too sick to go to Kuala Lumpur. Travelling in a timber lorry day in and day out from my farm to Taiping shook my nerves very badly. Climbing three flights of stairs aggravated my condition, the same three flights that kept me from meeting Soekarno. I would like to quote Ibrahim's explanation as well as that of Lt Osman Daim,¹⁴ his secretary on that trip, on the KRIS Congress. According to his letter dated 20 May 1975, Ibrahim claimed:

But how sad and threatened I felt when on 15.8.1945, I heard the Japanese had surrendered, our independence proclamation thwarted. We, who gathered in

Kuala Lumpur, wanted to convene the KRIS Congress immediately and acted by holding a leaders' meeting at the Station Hotel and decided:

1. The struggle for Independence together with Indonesia should be carried on by IBHY (Ibrahim Yaakub), Onan Siraj, Hassan Manan with Ramly Tahir sent to Jakarta (Ramly did not make it).
2. Leadership of the KRIS Congress on 16 and 17 August would be assigned to Dr Burhanuddin, together with Hassan Manan, Dato' Onn, Tengku Hussein (Singapore) and others.
3. IBHY, Onan Siraj and Ramly Tahir should leave for Singapore on the night of 15.8.45 to arrange a delegation to Jakarta; a Giyu Gun squad should be sent to Kuala Lumpur to be with the MPAJA to oppose British troops.
4. At 2.00 pm on 17.8.1945, the three of us arrived in Singapore and discussed matters with Singapore MPAJA representatives at Tiong Bharu, who agreed that the Giyu Gun be sent to Kuala Lumpur.

On the other hand, in his letter on the KRIS Congress, Lt Osman Daim wrote:

1. Many Malay leaders, including the late Datuk Onn, were present, but as Japan had surrendered, the Congress could not be held. The same night I burned all papers in the (Station) Hotel's bathroom. The next day, I was asked to return to Singapore carrying two armfuls of cloth bundles, one containing Japanese currency and the other British currency. I tended to the two bundles with utmost care, not leaving them even for one brief second. They were to be handed to Enchik Ibrahim Yaakub in Singapore. Many other leaders, including Datuk Onn and Enchik Samad Ismail, were travelling on the mail train back to Singapore. Ibrahim Yaakub had returned (to Singapore) earlier, but I don't know by what means.
2. While passing Kluang, the train was ambushed by communists. It was derailed. While the train was being shot at, I took shelter, but kept holding on to the two bundles tightly. After several hours of waiting there, we got on to another train to carry on with our travel to Singapore. We arrived in Singapore at night and Enchik Ibrahim was waiting at the Singapore Railway Station and took the two bundles from me.¹⁵ He advised me to return to my village.

Later, on 9 January 1977, Lt Gen. Fujiwara Iwaichi (former leader of Fujiwara Kikan), whom I met at the Rasa Sayang Hotel in Penang during his Malaysian visit for a meeting at the University of Malaya, told me that Ibrahim was given gold bullion as well as cash by the Japanese. Fujiwara emphasised this by hand gestures to show something heavy saying "*Gorr, gorr.*"¹⁶ I took with me Hamzah A. Cunard, former member of IIL and member of Fujiwara Kikan, to see Fujiwara that night.

The two letters by Ibrahim and Lt Osman Daim contain many conflicting claims. Ibrahim claimed that "we were sent to Jakarta by the KRIS Leaders Congress" while Lt Osman Daim wrote that the KRIS Congress was never convened.¹⁷ All working papers were burnt in the Station Hotel's bathroom. Datuk Onn, one of those assigned by Ibrahim

to carry on with the Congress with Dr Burhanuddin on 16 and 17 August 1945, was also on the same mail train with Osman Daim, heading towards Singapore. Was that why Ibrahim accused Datuk Onn of being a ‘traitor’ on page 3 of his letter to me with copies to three historians?¹⁸

My Analysis

I am making this analysis as if I was one of those in the Station Hotel in Kuala Lumpur as assigned by Ibrahim Yaakub to carry on with the KRIS Congress on 16 and 17 August. Who would dare stay in the Station Hotel after the Japanese surrender? As Ibrahim himself had sought a way to save himself, so would others, and they cannot be blamed for wanting to save themselves. Ibrahim should not have ordered the others to remain in the middle of Kuala Lumpur, in a hotel building not owned by Malays, and even ask them to carry on with a national political congress! It was a very dangerous time as the Japanese who were willing to protect the Congress had surrendered, and a new power was about to assert itself in the vacuum, before British return.

I think news of the Japanese surrender had reached the MPAJA guerrillas at the latest by 15 August as they possessed radios and were in constant contact with Force 136, which supplied them with war news. Even those in remote areas knew of the Japanese surrender on 15 August, or at the latest, by the following day. Luckily, the KRIS Congress delegation used their common sense to avoid being trapped. Had the Congress been convened as planned, something might have happened at the hotel on 17 and/or 18 August. According to Ibrahim, he was sent to Jakarta by the KRIS Congress and that his friend Ramli Tahir did not go with him. Ramli’s seat was filled by Ibrahim’s wife, Mariatun Haji Siraj. Ramli, who now lives in Penang, told me Ibrahim did not invite him with sincerity. Furthermore, why should Ramli flee?

According to historian Robert Reece, who interviewed Ibrahim in February 1973, Ibrahim Yaakub had “returned to Kuala Lumpur and heard of the surrender. Could not attend the KRIS Congress in Kuala Lumpur on 15 August 1945. Returned to Singapore and arrived there on 16.8.1945. Requested to be flown to Jakarta for discussion with Ir Soekarno. On 18.8.1945 the Japanese flew Ibrahim Yaakub and four mates out of Singapore at 1.00 pm on 19.8.1945 with Hassan Manan; Ramly bin Haji Tahir declined the offer at the last moment (Ramly’s place filled by Ibrahim’s wife, Mariatun Haji Siraj) and Onan Siraj (Ibrahim’s brother-in-law).” *Sejarah Nasional Maphilindo* (p. 13) by Prof. Amat Juhari Moein observed, “...from that date (18.8.1945) Ibrahim Yaakub was no

longer seen in Malaya as he had escaped to Indonesia to avoid arrest by the British who would be returning to Malaya.”

It should now be clear that Ibrahim’s departure for Indonesia was not mandated by the KRIS Congress because the Congress was not convened. We have also deduced from various sources that his departure was to escape British arrest. Ibrahim himself wrote that what took place in the Station Hotel in Kuala Lumpur was only a KMM inner committee meeting. This was contained in his 17 March 1972 letter to Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, attempting to explain his position and indirectly requesting the Prime Minister’s permission to return to Malaysia (Malaya). In his letter, Ibrahim did not once mention the KRIS Congress. He wrote, “My explanation is as follows. Responsible for carrying on the KMM struggle.

1. KMM inner Committee held a meeting on 15 August 1945 at the Kuala Lumpur Station Hotel.”

On his claim that Malai Giyu Gun members were sent to Kuala Lumpur to work with the MPAJA to oppose the British forces, Lt Osman Daim explained:

After about a year in Johore Baru, the (Malai Giyu Gun) battalion was moved to Ipoh. After several months there, it was moved to Singapore. It was pathetic; morale was low. The Japanese were receiving severe blows at various fronts, so their policy towards Giyu Gun altered radically. Before moving to Singapore many soldiers and low ranking officers were allowed to leave the battalion which was reduced to half, consisting of two companies and an officers corps at the Japanese High Command in Singapore (Tanglin). It was led by Lt Col. Ibrahim Yaakub with no definite duties. Both companies were then shifted from the infantry corps to the artillery based in two different areas in Kampong Radin Mas, Singapore.

My comment: What strength did Ibrahim have to oppose the Allied Forces together with the MPAJA¹⁹ when he only had two companies remaining? If I am not wrong, one company comprises 112 men or maybe even less.

My Deepest Regret

I cried when I heard that the Japanese had surrendered on 15 August simply because there were only 48 hours separating us from the declaration of Independence for Malaya. This was indeed a tragic case of ‘So near, yet so far’. I regretted the matter deeply as Malaya would once again be colonised and gripped by a Western power. Even tears of blood could not rectify the situation. That was one of the most bitter moments of my life.

Notes

1. Prof. Yoichi Itagaki was Chief Advisor on Malay Affairs in the Japanese Military Administration at that time and played a major role in the formation of Hodoshō and KRIS. He was one of the last few Japanese Officers I met after Japan surrendered, where they discussed and analysed their defeat. Story will follow. He is now with Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo.
2. As Prof. Yoichi Itagaki maintained, KRIS stood for Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa (Special Strength of the People) and not Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung (Union of Peninsular Indonesians) as later announced by Ibrahim after his migration to Indonesia. According to Prof. Itagaki, “the name Ibrahim declared after the War was not the one chosen in May 1945, but was one coined by Ibrahim to justify his migration.” See *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-45: Ibrahim Yaacob and the Struggle for Indonesia Raya* (p. 111) by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng. The word Semenanjung at the end of Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa was an addition made in Taiping while we were active in KRIS.
3. See *Red Star over Malaya* (p. 114) by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng.
4. Excerpt from a letter by Dr Anthony Reid, National University of Australia, describing his interview with Prof. Itagaki on 24 August 1973 in Japan. The letter was handed to me by Ms Halinah Bhamadaj.
5. See *Red Star over Malaya* by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng (p. 115). Also *Azia tonō Taiwa* (Dialogue with Asia) by Prof. Yoichi Itagaki (pp. 162-3).
6. Excerpt from a letter by Dr Anthony Reid, National University of Australia, describing his interview with Prof. Itagaki on 24 August 1973 in Japan. Letter handed to me by Ms Halinah Bhamadaj.
7. *Kumiai* is a Japanese company, society or guild.
8. I did not tell my wife of this incident till years later.
9. In her unpublished thesis, “The Impact of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya on Malay Society and Politics” (pp. 111-2), Ms Halinah Bhamadaj wrote: “During the Occupation, Mustapha Hussain, one of the leaders closest to Ibrahim, became so disillusioned with the Japanese, so incensed against their treatment of the public that he left Singapore and returned to Taiping, where he took no part in further political activity.”
10. In Taiping, we knew KRIS as Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa Semenanjung not Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung.
11. As in *Red Star over Malaya* and *Aiza tonō Taiwa*.
12. See “Some Aspects of the Japanese Policy for Malaya under the Occupation, with Special Reference to Nationalism” (p. 264).
13. *Translator’s note*: My father’s health worsened. He could only walk with the aid of a cane. Sometimes, he could not even get up, so he shuffled on the floor. My grandfather now had to care for my father and his family. In the 40 years I knew my father, he was plagued by painful muscular and joint pains, which so completely debilitated him that he could never be part of our fun and games. Even ordinary daily movements like walking caused burning, aching, throbbing and tearing pains in his muscles, with stiffness and weakness in his joints. The pain was often accompanied by fatigue.

It got worse if he was also burdened by anxiety and stress. The flare-ups in his joints caused his lymph nodes to swell into painful lumps and to bring on fevers, which he frequently had throughout his life. His muscular pains were slightly reduced by massage, especially at certain points, like the back of his neck and the joints

between his legs and buttocks. Each day, after school, my sister Nadira and I took turns to step on his body as he lay face down on the bed, groaning in pain. Sometimes, we both did this together because one person was not enough. We were so good at it that we could just 'walk' on his body, find the 'knots' and keep pressing on them to rid him of the 'knots'. We were so skilled that we could talk or let our minds roam free as we let our feet do the work.

I must add that all his life, my poor father never knew good health. He was also plagued by asthma, diabetes (he had daily insulin jabs for the last 15 years of his life), skin problems on his ankles and neck (from sleeping on a prison bed for a year), hypertension and 'stones' in his bladder. But he was an excellent and disciplined patient; he followed the doctor's dietary advice to the 't' and would quietly eat his bland food portion, even though our dinner table was jam-packed with delicacies. This strict regimen must have helped him reach 77, though he had hoped to live as long as his father, who died at 90.

14. He accompanied Ibrahim to Taiping in the second week of August 1945 and was Ibrahim's Secretary for the visit. He was the one entrusted to carry two cloth bundles of money which were later handed over to Ibrahim in Singapore.
15. Front page headline of *Malaya Merdeka*, a national newsletter published by Malay political party UMNO (United Malay National Organisation in Kuala Lumpur) March 1963 edition: "Ibrahim Yaakub's Story: Malay Coward and Traitor who managed to fool many Indonesian leaders." The writer, a Malayan Patriot in Jakarta wrote, "Because of his services to the Japanese Military, Ibrahim Yaakub was flown out (of Malaya) by the Japanese, first to Palembang and then to Jakarta. Ibrahim was also supplied with crates of Japanese currency for his services in Malaya."
16. The same publication continues, "At another time, Iskandar Kamel's (Ibrahim Yaakub) name was reported in the dailies for involvement in hoarding gold pieces in his bank when the Indonesian government devalued rupiahs by half. The Indonesian military and police forced bank closures, investigations and raids on all banks hoarding such gold, including BANK BINA owned by Ibrahim Yaakub."
17. The KRIS Congress, which was to be held in mid-August (1945), had to be called off and only a committee meeting was held. See *History for Form Two* by Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, Khoo Kay Kim and Mohd Yusof bin Ibrahim (p. 128).
18. Prof. Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, Malay scholar Buyung Adil and Prof. Amat Juhari Moain.
19. Ibrahim's claim to have contacted the MPAJA is ludicrous. Contrary to Ibrahim's claim, Sutan Jenain denied playing middleman between Ibrahim and the MPAJA. Sutan Jenain was not a member of the MCP (Malayan Communist Party) and was seen by MCP members as a Trotskyist. Furthermore, who would deal with KMM/Malai Giyu Gun that once helped bring the Japanese into Malaya? MPAJA would find that fact hard to forget.

The Japanese Surrender (15 August 1945): Independence Cheated by 48 Hours

On 6 August 1945, an American B-29 bomber nicknamed ‘Enola Gay’ and piloted by Colonel Paul Tibbets, dropped its deathly 4,500 kg cargo. The world’s first atomic bomb razed Hiroshima and annihilated 100,000 Japanese. Several days later, Nagasaki was reduced to ashes, decimating more lives. Japan knelt in abject defeat. Before the dust of demolition could settle, the Western powers were already packing up, readying themselves to return to their former colonies.

In Malaya, whispers of Japanese imminent surrender gained strength, as a forest fire would, when Haji Bahari bin Haji Sidek, appeared in the general area after a long absence. Haji Bahari, a student in Mecca before World War II broke out, had been recruited by the British guerrilla Force 136 based in India. The Malay Section of the British sponsored anti-Japanese guerrilla unit, Force 136 was headed by Major Tengku Mahmood Mahyideen, of the Pattani nobility.

Parachuted into the jungle of Grik, Haji Bahari returned to Batu Kurau, two miles from my hill-farm, with news of the imminent surrender. To prove he had returned from overseas, small bottles of perfume (*minyak atar*) were distributed to curious *kampung* folks who visited him. “If Japan would not bow, Allied ground troops and air forces would combat them,” he asserted. By God’s Grace, this was not to be, or else innocent *kampung* folks would have been trapped in the ensuing battle. Haji Bahari let it be known that the British would reward him with a big post.

After a brief visit, Ibrahim Yaakub had left my farm on 13 August 1945, vowing, “Should something undesirable happen I would depart for Indonesia and I would continue KMM’s struggle from there.” He had tried to coax me into accompanying him to Indonesia, but I refused. I felt responsible for KMM members who would now have to face the accumulated wrath of the returning British. I felt answerable for members whom we (KMM leaders) had taken this far!

On 15 August, I heard the Malaya-Sumatra Japanese Military Administration had surrendered. The Japanese ‘banana currency’ was no longer legal tender. I felt truly sorry for many uninformed Malays who were duped into selling almost all their livestock and were paid in Japanese currency by Chinese merchants who already knew of the surrender through their ‘jungle radios’. In the blink of an eye, the five Japanese men living in our village vanished into thin air. I carried on farming, not forgetting to carry my trusted machete, ready for any eventualities.

In the ensuing days, we heard about the fate of several policemen in Ijok, ten miles away. They were nabbed by marauding Bintang Tiga Chinese guerrillas and killed with draw-hoes near Bayur River. The heat closed in on us when we saw a Chinese banana seller emboldened into delivering a speech. A normally timid Chinese buffalo herder was openly declaring, “All Malay heads must be shaven!”

Village Security

Abductions and killings were rampant. *Kampung* folks, suddenly drawn into chaos, moved in indescribable fear. A few initiated a meeting at the Batu Kurau Mosque. Chaired by Chikgu Ali, who now lives in Kampung Boyan, Taiping, the meeting also included Mosque Committee Secretary, Major Mohd Mat Saman and committee member Haji Putih bin Haji Abdul Latip.¹

I was just an observer. The main agenda was to determine measures to counter aggressive Bintang Tiga guerrillas (mostly Chinese) who had assumed power in the vacuum. To break an impasse, I asked a pot-bellied old man, “Pak Da, should the Bintang Tiga guerrillas point a pistol at your tummy, what would you do?” He answered, “I would just give in,” in his Pattani slang. “Pak Da should reply this way – should you kill me, all members of your race will be killed too. Not only in this village, but in Kampung Perak, in Jelai, in Pantai Besar – everywhere!” I encouraged him. I then broke into a short speech to whip their spirits up until the chairman himself stood up to declare, “If that is what Che Mustapha says we should do, not only to Bayur River, but even to heaven’s seventh layer I am willing to go!”

I responded, “That is the spirit! Now, about security. It is not a difficult problem. Some of us in this *kampung* were once volunteers, if not soldiers. Let us set up sections of eight people. We have weapons! Each house has at least a machete, or an axe, or a saw, or a knife. Should the Bintang Tiga come in lorries, we cut down trees to block their route. Attack, and keep attacking if necessary. Don’t fear! Bullets can go astray

but machetes never miss!” So, a *kampung* vigilante corps was set up to defend lives and homes. Fearing the villagers might be ambushed while praying in the mosque, I suggested they take turns to pray, making sure some stayed outside on the lookout.

Not unexpectedly, among those at the meeting was an informer. After the vigilante corps was set up, Haji Putih came to look for me with grave concern in his eyes. He had gotten wind that I would be abducted and killed. I moved my wife to a friend’s hut up on a remote slope. I told her to stay in hiding with our four children, including Dinah, the youngest, only two months old. I was afraid they would be harmed. In that transition period between the Japanese surrender and the British return, Chinese guerrillas were on a rampage. Anything and everything could happen.

I hid in Haji Putih’s house that night. Before the crack of dawn, my faithful friend Hamid² and I travelled on a bamboo raft for some distance before crossing the Ara River. We then trudged through desolate Malay *kampungs*, harvested rice fields, newly-tilled plots and jungle fringes until we found the Pondok Tanjung-Taiping rail track. This circuitous route was necessary as many roads were already blocked by the Bintang Tiga guerrillas who had emerged in droves from their jungle hideouts.

Last Meeting with Umezu and Itagaki – 18 or 19 August 1945

After thanking Hamid and asking him to return to Batu 20, I walked almost fifteen miles along the rail track. As soon as I hit Taiping, I stopped at the Kampung Boyan home of KMM member Hanif Sulaiman, not only to take a breather and a drink of water, but also to discuss how I could escape arrest. Alas, he was unable to offer appropriate advice. From his house, I walked to the Japanese Hodoshō Office in the Taiping Nurses Hostel (now an annex of the Taiping’s new General Hospital) to see the Japanese Officers still there, including Prof. Itagaki and Major General Umezu,³ Malaya-Sumatra Japanese Military Administration Chief.

The Japanese were shocked to see me, as if they had seen a Malay ghost, because Dr Burhanuddin had told them I had been killed by the Bintang Tiga. They enquired about me and my future plans. I requested for a pistol, but General Umezu said, “It is impossible as all weapons had been serialised for surrender to the Allied Forces.” He then added, “American very bad man, you know!” I was livid. “What! You are afraid to give me one pistol! You all have lost the war and will be sent home to Japan. But what about me? If I am not hanged, I may be shot by the returning British. Not that I am afraid!”

General Umezu summoned all the Japanese Officers within the office to bow to me, a mark of respect for my courage. He commended, "Here is a fine example of a brave Malay who is willing to continue fighting!" Upon my insistence, they relented and handed me a small automatic with a faulty safety catch and fifty bullets.

Japanese Officers' Analysis of Their Defeat

I had to wait for the veil of twilight before I could leave the Hodosho Office undetected. The Japanese Officers and I spent the time discussing many aspects on the just-concluded war and on Japan's future. Despite the grim and wrenching sense of defeat, these Japanese Officers were still spirited enough to analyse the defeat. The following are some of their observations.

Japan lacked sophisticated weapons and radars like those owned by the Americans. Thus, Japanese submarines could not avoid detection and destruction. The Japanese secret intention of overrunning Australia under the leadership of Admiral Yamamoto was found out. Had the Japanese landed in Australia, the Pacific War would have concluded with a Japanese victory and Australia would be in their grasp. One of them asked me, "If a very brave soldier is given a not too sophisticated weapon while a coward of a soldier carries a much better weapon, who would win?" I tried to help by answering that the coward would win, giving them my own reasons. They nodded their heads in unison.

They next concluded that Japan lost because it had yet to invent the atomic bomb. Their research went astray. At that very instant, in those moments of abject defeat, Japanese Officers at the Hodosho Office made a vow to step up research in science and technology and resolved to continue atomic bomb research along Mount Fuji's foothills. In my heart I told myself, "You have just lost a war! You are already thinking of another one!"

Japan, they said, had only 120 million people. America had more. But according to statistics, a defeated nation would produce more children. Victorious America would become more prosperous, but its population would not increase rapidly. So, within 25 years, Japan's population would be equal in number to America's. I sensed it was as if they were planning another war against America within 25 years. Finally, the number of Japanese soldiers who died since Japan went to war with China was small – only one million. Destruction to Japanese industry was also negligible – not more than 25 per cent.

Listening to their analysis, I realised how strongly committed and loyal the Japanese were to the future of their people and nation. But, what

about the fate of Malay fighters in Malaya who would now have to face the music? To face the returning British? To face trials and tribulations, dangers and threats?

Where Would I Go?

When the thick curtain of night almost fell, I bade “*Sayonara*” to all the Japanese Officers present in the Hodoshō Office. They responded with “*Sayonara Guzaimas,*” and bowed their bodies as low as they could, with extreme reverence. That was the moment I bid goodbye to my Japanese experience.

I stepped out of the building, not knowing what to do or where to go next. I roamed in some ‘safe’ parts of Taiping with a hundred and one things swimming in my mind. I asked myself, “Was I not a Fujiwara Kikan’s Fifth Columnist? I am sure the British Intelligence will look for me when they return. Or were they already here? Would I be arrested and brought to trial or would I be killed without a chance to defend myself?” I was afraid of being shot without a trial; I had to avoid arrest. My hand was buried deep in my pocket, gripping the automatic within, ready for any eventualities.

My steps took me to my brother’s house along Jalan Walker which he shared with Ariffin bin Buyung, a spirited young man from Bagan Serai. I went there hoping to meet with Dr Burhanuddin, who lived only four doors away, to discuss tactics to guarantee the safety and security of all KMM members involved in the war, and also to discuss future moves to advance our Malay struggle. When my brother Yusof went to invite Dr Burhanuddin over, he came like a shot, shocked to see me still alive. He said in between gasps, “I had told the Japanese *Kakka* (Chief) you are dead.”

Before I could explain my predicament, why I had left my family hiding in a *kampung* hut just to seek ways to save the skin of all KMM members (myself included), he asked impatiently, “Why did you come here? You’d better go quickly. If the Bintang Tiga know you are here, they will burn our homes!” It was my brother’s friend Ariffin who glared at him and responded, “Why are you shouting at Che Mustapha? This is our house, not yours!” Turning to me, he said, “Che Mustapha, don’t worry, just ignore him. You stay here with us!”

I spent a listless night immersed in flashbacks of events that happened before that night, wondering what lay ahead. I recalled Dr Burhanuddin’s reaction with an ache in my heart. It is not my intention to mention a friend’s negative reaction, but what transpired between Dr Burhanuddin

and me that day clearly demonstrated the extreme fear the Malays had for the Bintang Tiga.

The next day I asked someone to call an acquaintance who once worked with the Japanese Military Administration to meet me. KMM members and I had once helped send him home to Kuantan in the confusion of war, but now he refused to see me. I was deeply hurt. A few days later I saw him walking with his nose in the air; the white master had assigned him on an important secret mission to Singapore.⁴

I left my brother's house utterly disappointed. This big world had suddenly become such a lonely place for me. What about my family hiding in the battered hut in Batu 20? I walked alone to Osman Bakery, owned by my father's great friend, Mamak Osman. En route, the Bintang Tiga boys stopped me, but they did not find the automatic in my pocket. I hid in the bakery's dark and airless attic, but just hours after my arrival, a Chinese boy enquired about my identity and where I came from.

Mamak Osman called me to say something. He began, "Please don't be upset or misconstrue what I am going to say". My heart jumped a beat, telling myself, "My fate is still bad. Yesterday I was chased away by a friend. Looks like I will be chased away again!" But on the contrary, this old man feared for my safety and advised me to leave when darkness fell, and walk to his Assam Kumbang home, which he felt was safer than his bakery, which was along a main thoroughfare. This big-hearted man was unafraid that the plague I carried would be inflicted on his family. God works in mysterious ways. Chased away from one place, I was welcomed at another. I moved to his Assam Kumbang house and stayed there two days.

In Taiping town, a lorry was making its round, with the attendant throwing ropes about two metres in length to the people, as if inviting them to use them to tie up enemies of the new power, the Bintang Tiga. My brother Yahaya, an Agricultural Officer in Jerantut, Pahang had already been killed by the Bintang Tiga. His pregnant wife, who appealed, "If you kill my husband you might as well kill me," was also killed. They were buried in a single unmarked grave in Damak, Pahang.

The new British Military Administration (BMA) opened an office in Taiping to register former British Government servants, offering a \$250 advance to report to their former workplaces all over Malaya. I braved myself to register at the Whiteaways (now the location of Malayan Banking Berhad in Taiping) to receive the \$250. Cautiously stepping out of the building, I was shocked beyond words to see Dr Burhanuddin sitting comfortably in a British Propaganda Office vehicle. He was now employed by the British. I felt as if the sky had fallen on my head. Had

anyone else informed me, I would not have believed it. Later that evening, Mamak Osman asked, “Did you happen to see Dr Burhanuddin?” I replied, “Yes, I saw him.”

After that, I felt the British Intelligence’s eyes following my every move; a Malay who once worked for the Japanese was now working with the BMA and he had seen me taking the advance. However, they did not get to me as Mamak Osman hid me several times. Sometimes, when I returned to his house, Mamak Osman would say, “Someone was looking for you, just now.” In any case, I used the \$250 advance to buy food such as bread, biscuits, jam, chocolate and cheese, which my family had not seen for almost four years. I even managed to catch a *bangsawan* stage show before returning to my family. I behaved like a man who would soon face an execution. As I watched tiny girls dancing on stage, I threw coins at their feet.

In Batu 20, I found my family safe and sound under the protection of some village elders.⁵ My family already owned British currency; they had carried on farming and sold the produce during my absence. I looked up some friends to find out how they were and to offer help. After all, I already owned a small pistol.⁶

Notes

1. Statement by Batu 20 villager Haji Putih bin Haji Latip appended to Memoir Mustapha Hussain (Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 25, pp. 647-8).
2. Batu 20 coffee-shop owner during the Japanese Occupation, to whom I am greatly indebted.
3. Chief of Malaya-Sumatra Japanese Military Administration with whom I had once argued over the formation of KRIS and Independent Malaya Declaration. After the war, Major General Umezu was condemned to life imprisonment and later died in prison in 1949.
4. He was sent by the BMA to Singapore to look for Ibrahim Yaakub, but Ibrahim had already left for Indonesia.
5. *Translator’s note:* My mother Mariah could not believe herself when she heard my father’s voice calling from the pitch-black night outside the hut; he was still alive. My sister Hendun, fast asleep then, can still remember how she was awakened by the wonderful smell of soap when my father held it above her nose. Everyone was thrilled that my father had returned with food and some luxuries they had missed for three years and eight months.
6. Later, before going to meet Force 136 Officer, the pistol was given to my wife Mariah to be thrown away.
Translator’s note: According to my sister Ayesha, our mother placed the weapon in a can of dry *padi* husk (to stop it from rusting) and buried it beside the outhouse. My mother has forgotten why she buried the pistol.

Arrest and Interrogation (1945): The Informer and the Bed Bugs

When things calmed down a little in Batu 20, I felt less uneasy to leave my family. It was time for me to go to Taiping to settle my position as a KMM leader with the newly installed British Military Administration (BMA). Sadly, I bade my wife and four children goodbye. Would I ever see them again? Maybe not! But I kept all anxieties buried deep within me; they must not know. I went around to bid farewell to the *kampung* folks who assured me they would keep an eye on my family. I thanked everyone, regardless of race, for all their help. Sundry shop owners had allowed my family to buy food on credit; Pak Chik Yassin and his many wives had lightened my wife's burden on the farm; brothers Buyung and Ibrahim bin Lebai Mat and their mother were always making sure strangers did not bother my family.

As soon as I arrived in Taiping, I sought my father, his baker friend Mamak Osman and KMM member Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman.¹ To them I laid out my plans to seek safety for all KMM members but could not move until the return of several KMM members dispatched to Kuala Lumpur, under most difficult situations, to check on the fate of KMM members there. After a short stay at Chikgu Mohd Isa's house in the Taiping Malay School compound, my awaited KMM friends returned with the grim news that many KMM members in Kuala Lumpur had been arrested and detained. I came up with a decision supported by the three men; I would go to see Force 136's British Officer to explain KMM's position and its involvement in the war. Little did the three know what was running through my head. I might not be coming back and if I could choose my death, I would prefer to be shot than hanged. Accompanied by faithful Chikgu Mohd Isa, I travelled to Kuala Kangsar in a Chinese man's car. Malay folks who saw us in the car were aghast; they thought the dreaded Bintang Tiga was hauling up Chikgu Mohd Isa and me.

Meeting with Lt Col Peter G. Dobree in Kuala Kangsar and Arrest

As twilight descended upon us I reached Kuala Kangsar, about twenty-five miles from Taiping. After shaking his hands, I told Chikgu Mohd Isa to leave me there. This friend, although a minor player in the Malay struggle for Independence, was loyal to our national cause. He reluctantly left me with eyes almost brimming with tears. I walked towards a two-storey wooden building on the left side of the road, just a short distance beyond Kuala Kangsar District Office, now converted into Force 136 HQ under the supervision of Colonel Peter G. Dobree.² Upstairs, I met Col Dobree to whom I tried to explain the objective of my visit. I told him that KMM efforts to save Malays during the Japanese Occupation were similar to what the IIL (Indian Independence League) and the Overseas Chinese Association did to save their own people. Col Dobree did not utter a word as his eyes scanned an 'arrest on sight' list³ in his hand.

As his eyes travelled down the list of names 'wanted' by the British Intelligence, I asked for a stick of Capstan No. 5 cigarette from a tin on his desk. I had not smoked this brand for three years and eight months. Were English cigarettes not the best in the world? Even Russian leaders smoked English cigarettes! Reluctantly, he allowed me to take a stick. He was still busily searching for my name. After some time, he caught it, located almost at the top of the first page! Col Dobree sprang to his feet, hardly believing that this slight Malay man standing in front of him was one of the Malays most wanted by the British. Rather oddly, he did not say much. Instead, he instructed the young Malay guerrillas surrounding me to escort me to the Kuala Kangsar Police Station. These young Malays needed no encouragement to push and prod me with their rifles all the way to the Police Station, as if I was a common, despicable criminal. This was the first time I saw pump guns.

Along the way, I seized the opportunity to 'talk' to the guerrillas guarding me closely. I warned them not to be duped by white men. Colonialists will always be colonialists! Only one young man responded by telling me they were youths from the Lenggong and Grik area, and had been living in the jungle for several months with Col Dobree. At the Kuala Kangsar Police Station, I was roughly handed over to a policeman who jotted down all my particulars in a logbook. I immediately recognised a Police Inspector at his desk. At the height of the war in Kuala Lumpur, when I was moving with the Fujiwara Kikan, he had approached me for work. Now he pretended not to know me. I was shoved into a lock-up on the ground floor of the station where I remained for several days. I

slept on bare cement floor with my arm as a pillow. At night it was cold to the bone as the walls were mere grilles. (This station was demolished and rebuilt in 1975 and 1976.)

Daily lunch was a handful of plain rice, more rice husks than grains, served on a tin plate. Nothing else. Initially I ate just the rice, flicking aside the husks, but due to hunger, I downed husk and rice regardless. It was difficult swallowing the gritty husk, like swallowing coarse sand, but I had to. I had no chance to brush my teeth, comb my hair, or shave. School children walking briskly past my lock-up reminded me of my own. Were they in school? Surely not! My guess was right. With four children aged between ten years and two months, how could my wife send them to school as well as tend to the farm? They were living from hand to mouth, yet, my wife did not once grumble.

I was growing feeble and my nervous disorder returned to haunt me. My fingers shook, my legs weakened and my body felt completely debilitated. But, like a Godsend, Inspector Abdullah who had for our own good pretended not to know me earlier on came to assist me. After that, Malay constables begin to show me some compassion, so much so they ignored orders from Force 136 or British military officers.

In the short time I was locked up there, I managed to deliver a small lecture on Malay politics and the plight of the Malays under oppressive colonial grip. My audience was the youthful Malay guerrillas. Not too long after, I began to hear rumblings of complaints in Pattani-Lenggong dialect, "Tuan Dobree used to eat wild-growing fiddle-head ferns with us in the jungle. Now that he is dining with the Sultan, he hardly remembers us." They were slowly learning to size up the white men. It was only then that they cared to look my way and stopped calling me a 'Japanese collaborator'. Sometimes, police constables had to reprimand the guerrillas for interfering in police matters.

The Malay guerrillas later lamented, "We have been asked to return to our *kampungs* with \$200. That's all!" They then disclosed their fear of reprisals from Bintang Satu (Kuo Min Tang under Chiang Kai Shek) and Bintang Tiga (Kuo San Tong under Mao Tse Tung) members ready to carry arms to oppose the British imperialists. I could only say, "Looks like we are indeed in the same boat!" The Malay guerrillas nodded their heads, "You are right, Enchik, about imperialists. We are fully aware now."

One cold and damp night, I dreamt I was fishing under a completely barren tree by a murky river. When I felt something tugging at my line, I hauled the line up but it flew back and got entangled in the branches of the barren tree. This dream troubled me deeply. Even an idiot could

interpret it. It would be immensely difficult for me to get out of my current predicaments, just like trying to disentangle the line from the dead branches. I may even have to chop the tree down!

Moved to Ipoh

A fortnight later, a stiff-looking British Officer came to my cell and ordered me to follow him. I did not know where to and why. My hands were fitted with a pair of handcuffs, which gleamed like the handle of a brand new Raleigh bicycle. I was next instructed to get into a powerful Ford 8-cylinder jeep, mostly used by the British military. As we approached the Enggor Bridge that spanned the Perak River, the officer stopped his car and shouted, 'TK'. One of the Gurkhas manning the bridge waved his hand and we carried on across. I didn't know what 'TK' meant.

While sitting in the back seat, out of boredom I fiddled with the 'steel bracelet' I had never worn before and never dreamed of wearing. I was greatly surprised when one by one the handcuffs slipped off my skinny wrists. With great care, I slipped them quietly into my coat pocket. I guessed these new handcuffs were too loose for Asian wrists. I was relieved to have both hands free. If there were to be a Bintang Tiga ambush, I was free to bolt. The war has taught me many things about survival and self-preservation.

We carried on with our journey; the white officer-cum-driver was oblivious to the fact that my hands were free. As it turned out, I was being moved to Ipoh. Upon arrival at Ipoh Central Police Station near the clock tower, the officer fumbled for the key to my handcuffs before handing me over to the police there. It was then that I pulled the handcuffs out of my pocket and handed them to him. Many ordinary Malay policemen who witnessed the scene laughed their heads off; some asked how I freed myself. They did not seem to pay much attention to the white officer's presence or embarrassment.

From my experience at two police stations, comments that policemen were devoid of discipline were somewhat true. In my opinion, discipline was still present, but the unquestioning reverence for the white men no longer overwhelmed the Malays. After 15 February 1942, when Britain lost Malaya to Japan, the Malays were reborn with new spirit.

I was shoved into a rather large lock-up, which housed about forty detainees. Even in the poor light, I could sense the frozen welcome accorded me. In fact I detected suspicious glances. I said "Hello" to them and cracked a joke or two about my experience in Kuala Kangsar lock-up, but not a soul responded. Noticing a huge cauldron sitting on a

firewood stove in front of the lock-up, I asked, "Are the detainees being stewed here?" Even that did not tickle them. They kept mum.

The next day, after hundreds of attempts, I got to know a few of them: former Co-operative Officer Tahir; Kinta District Officer Raja Omar and several Chinese *towkays* (merchants and shopkeepers) who had co-operated with the Japanese during the Occupation years. But the majority of inmates were members of the Japanese Special Police arrested by the Bintang Tiga and handed over to the BMA. It then dawned on me why most detainees were suspicious of me. As most of them were familiar with police work, they feared I was an informer thrown into the lock-up to gain their confidence and gather information.

Still missing the luxury of a blanket and the softness of pillows, our beds were now planks, instead of the bare and cold cement. It was, however, impossible to sleep; monster-sized bed bugs were eating us alive. You just have to push a little finger in the crevice, and hundreds of them would be ready to attack. Some detainees were convinced specially bred bed bugs had been surreptitiously planted in the cell so that inmates could not sleep and would soon admit to their crimes. There was some truth in this.

I was still wearing clothes worn the day I left my farm more than a month earlier – an alpaca coat, a white (now grey-brown) shirt, a singlet, a checked *pulaikat* sarong, home-made underwear and a pair of old shoes, all aged not less than five years. These clothing items were acquired during the British rule, carried into the Japanese Occupation, and then into the Bintang Tiga transition period and now the BMA era. If I washed my underwear, I only wore my sarong. So it was with my shirt and singlet. But the alpaca coat was never washed as I needed it to keep me warm against the cold at night. Shoes had to be left at the Police Station's storeroom. Here, I did not get soap, toothbrush, toothpaste and razor blades. My hair was getting long.

My worst deprivation was not being able to smoke. Luckily, despite having no money, newfound friends secretly offered a puff or two. If luck was on my side, I would have some leftovers, which I hid in my clothes. I undid some stitches of my sleeve cuffs and hid broken bits of matches there. Cigarettes, also cut into short bits, were hidden in my coat underlining. My coat, which bore many secret holes, could match any magician's cape.

After a few days, I managed to gain the friendship of some fellow inmates. Raja Omar was suffering from the same nervous disorder as I did (and still do). He looked gloomy and his mental fortitude was fast slipping. Enchik Tahir was still able to laugh and was quite a joker. There

was a Malayan Japanese who told us not to add insult to injury by pleading softly, "Please don't rub it in." A rich Chinese *towkay's* son appeared the least troubled, but this young man was later imprisoned for ten years for serving the Japanese Police in Ipoh. This kind soul always shared his supply of Ipoh's famous ground-nuts with me. I started to crack jokes and spin a yarn or two, mostly those I heard from my good friend Captain Mohd Salleh when I was working as an Agricultural Assistant in Tapah.

We heard the BMA was searching for men involved in producing anti-British posters found all over Ipoh town. Although there were more than enough policemen to maintain law and order, they could not detect where these posters were produced. It was actually just next door to our lock-up where a detainee was working hand in hand with a night-soil carrier. But how the material and finished products were slipped in and out of the station no one knew. I then remembered reading a story about Russian leader Stalin printing Tsar paper currency underneath a circus ground to avoid Police detection. "Where there is a will, there is a way", the Malay proverb goes. When I was later moved to the Batu Gajah Prison, the poster-making detainee was already there. So was the 'night soil' (human toilet excrements) carrier collaborating with him, in the same erstwhile profession.

Interrogated by British Field Security Service Chief

Every day, two or three detainees were taken out to meet the Field Security Service (FSS) Chief in his office located near the Police Station. But there was one detainee hauled out once too often. Soon enough, it was my turn to be summoned. My heart thumped wildly. I was escorted out by an incredibly courteous British Sergeant, who did not treat me like a criminal. In fact we had a nice chat about Malaya's weather compared to India where he was once stationed. This polite Sergeant led me to an office where I was told to sit down opposite a Military Intelligence Captain who started to ask me questions on certain persons I knew in Taiping. It looked like I was going to be his source of information.

Among those he enquired about were Hanif Sulaiman, a KMM member accused of being a Japanese spy and supposedly linked to an Indian Muslim, Mamak Osman. Mamak Osman, owner of the British Malaya Bakery in Taiping, was also a suspect. I asked the FSS Captain, "What do you want to know about this kind person?" He shouted at me, "What kind person! He was a Japanese spy!" He claimed Mamak Osman was a good friend of Hanif Sulaiman and a pre-War Japanese dentist Matsu.

After the Japanese occupied Taiping, Matsu was said to have returned and had awarded Mamak Osman a contract to supply bread to the Taiping Prison inmates. Matsu was to have given Mamak Osman sacks of flour and other materials not available to others. As such, he raked in a lot of profit. In this complicity, the FSS Officer accused Hanif of being the middleman.

As I have narrated before, Mamak Osman was my father's good friend who had rendered me invaluable assistance. I had hid in his house when the Bintang Tiga guerrillas were on a rampage. In fact, I dare say he saved my life. Now God, the all-knowing, was giving a golden chance to repay my gratitude to this old man and I took full advantage of the situation. I replied to the FSS Officer that Hanif was an insurance agent who rented a small portion of Mamak Osman's bakery, and nothing more. I then continued, "Your informer is correct, there was a Japanese named Matsu, but what he does not know is that there were two different Matsus. The one Mamak Osman was friendly with before the war was 'Matsu the dentist'. Mamak Osman took his many children to Matsu because Japanese dentists were more skilled than Chinese ones then. The Matsu who came after the war was a baker from Tokyo."

"With regard to the two Indian soldiers employed to guard the bakery, that was because the Japanese feared a bread riot." I concluded, "If you issue an arrest warrant against this old man, you would be committing a serious mistake. I have seen and heard this old man pray that the British return soon!" After that, Mamak Osman's name was scratched off his list. To end the interrogation, the FSS Officer asked jokingly, "To you, everyone is kind. What about you yourself?" I answered by inviting him to investigate my case from Kuala Lumpur CID Police Officers and Malay Regiment soldiers from all over Malaya who may by now have reported themselves at the Port Dickson Military Camp. He replied simply, "We shall see."

Interrogated Again

I was called many times for interrogation. Other names I was queried about were:

- A. Talib bin Haji Ahmad, leader of the PPMP (Perak Malay Youth Association) whose members sympathised with KMM and participated in the war as Japanese Fifth Columnists. Remember the 'Pak Itam Sulaiman World Power' and Talib episode in Ipoh? I replied that I had met Talib only once and knew nothing more about him. Later,

when my father came to visit me in the lock-up, I asked him to look for Talib and warn him. This my father did, and Talib was able to flee to Mambang, Pahang and escape arrest.

- Raja Omar, the Malay British Government Officer who was promoted to become Kinta District Officer during the Occupation. I told the FSS Officer I didn't know what crime he was charged with. What I knew was that his promotion could be due to his Japanese wife. As for reading an annual pledge of allegiance to the Japanese Emperor, it was required of him and it was also to ensure no harm came to his family. I asked the FSS Officer, "Is it a crime for him to marry a Japanese woman?" He laughed raucously, raised two fingers and said, "Two?!"
- Enchik Tahir, a former Co-operative Officer. I tried my level best to explain Enchik Tahir's position, which I knew well. The Japanese made him Perak Chief Police Officer after District Chief Datuk Panglima Kinta was unwilling to shoulder the position. Having been nominated by a District Chief, he had to take on the new position, or many Perak Malay Chiefs would have been slapped about. Was it his crime to have been selected? I swore I did not know Enchik Tahir's other wrong-doings, yet, he remained in custody. At the end of each interrogation, I did not tire of asking, "What about me?" Each time, the FSS Officer answered, "We are investigating. I will let you know later."

One detainee, a Bangladeshi engineer, had worked at the Chenderoh Dam during British rule. Before retreating, the British destroyed the plant's governor, but this ingenious engineer managed to design a new governor that kept the plant operational throughout the Occupation. This immensely angered the British.

One day, Pavee, a Police Inspector detainee claimed to have heard loud whistling of the blabber bird *burung murai*. He asked me what it portends. I told him it was a propitious one. According to old wives' tales, it meant he would be talking to a lot of people; perhaps he would be set free the same day. As it turned out, Pavee was released the same day. Since that day, I became a much sought after fortune-teller.

Identifying an Informer

Many detainees complained that their secrets, big and small, had reached the FSS Captain's ears. They appealed for my help to identify the informer. After lunch one day, I narrated a story, a Malay psychological test to fathom the minds of others. "Once upon a time, a beautiful princess

went missing and her distraught father ordered his men to announce that whoever returned his princess to the palace would have her hand in marriage. A fortune-teller was the first to offer his help. He claimed that a huge legendary bird had flown her to a faraway island. A renowned boat-maker offered his services and built a strong boat for the journey. Several warriors sailed to the island and saw the huge bird guarding the princess in a mountaintop cave. To kill the bird, a famous archer came forward and with one arrow killed it. The princess was returned to the palace.”

Now, who deserves the princess? I called upon fellow detainees to guess the most deserving person; the fortune-teller, the boatman or the archer? There was a lot of commotion as they discussed the matter among themselves, making so much noise that a constable came to shut us up. Some named the boat-maker, for without the boat, no one could have reached the island. Others cited the fortune-teller for it was he who foretold where the princess was. Only one detainee chose the archer and kept defending his argument. The one who chose the archer was the informer ‘kicked into’ our lock-up and he was the one often called out for ‘interrogations’. This somewhat weird guy napped each afternoon. Because of his sinus, he snored heavily and sometimes spluttered in his sleep. We thus nicknamed him ‘sawmill’ and when he spluttered, we would say, “The saw must have hit a tough node.”

When fellow detainees insisted on the right answer to the puzzle I said all answers were correct. But as soon as the ‘sawmill’ left for another ‘questioning’ I revealed the true answer. I told them whoever chose the fortune-teller was lazy, just like the fortune-teller. All fingers pointed to an Indian man who had given himself away. He was indeed the laziest. He would not wash his clothes, comb his hair or help other detainees on bed bug eradication campaigns. Then the one who guessed the boatman asked, “What about the boatman?” “The one who chose the boatman is a hardworking fellow,” I revealed. Everyone agreed, saying “True, true”, pointing their fingers at Ibrahim, Special Police member from Tapah. He was always doing something. He would go on bed bug eradication campaigns not only in his area but the entire lock-up. My lock-up mates were growing impatient to know the trait of the man who chose the archer. I replied in one sentence, “His tongue is as sharp as his arrow!” The entire group agreed, “We suspected him all along!”

Some detainees went on a mission. They collected bed bugs in a matchbox. Later, when the ‘sawmill’ spluttered in his sleep, one detainee poured the matchbox full of bed bugs into his mouth. The ‘sawmill’ sat upright, screaming in between chokes. I heard the commotion as I was

coming back from an interrogation. Not long after, the informer was taken away and that was the last we saw of him. We became more cautious to ensure no informers would penetrate our line. We carried out our own screenings.

The same night, police constables had a tough time calming down a frenzied situation. The police were responsible for the uproar. They had locked-up a shapely Korean woman who kept ‘playing eyes’ with whosoever looked her way. Detainees were scrambling to go to the toilet, situated just beyond her lock-up. Just imagine, sixty hungry lions receiving the come-on signal from a young lioness! The situation returned to normal soon after she was moved out of sight.

Notes

1. Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman was a KMM member who moved with Fujiwara Kikan from Taiping to Kuala Lumpur at the beginning of the Japanese Invasion. He was in politics all his life; from KMM to Malay Nationalist Party, to a Singapore political body and finally UMNO (United Malays National Organisation). He recently held the post of UMNO Permanent Chairman in Parit Buntar, Perak. Detained for many years and dismissed from his job by the British Government, his last position was with the Department of Broadcasting. We remained friends till his death.
2. Lt Col Peter G. Dobree was a Force 136 Officer who led local guerrillas against the Japanese in 1945. He was an agriculture graduate from Reading University in England who first came out to Malaya as an estate manager in Johore and Melaka in 1935. He later worked for the Department of Agriculture in 1937. Forty years later, in September 1989, Dobree returned to Malaysia on a visit.
3. The FSS ‘Arrest on sight’ list read, “Look out for the following members of the KMM.... Mustapha bin Haji Hussein (*sic*) vice president of KMM, born Perak lecturer Serdang Agricultural School. Believed in Ipoh 20 August under protection of Professor Itagaki.” (Page 274 of *Red Star over Malaya* by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng.)

Batu Gajah Prison (1945-46)

The Batu Gajah Prison was, and is still, located amidst neat government offices and quarters not far from the Batu Gajah town. Its high brick walls were painted Portuguese-red and crowned with jagged broken bottles and glass. Before World War II, my brother Alli lived in a wooden quarters just behind the prison. It was easier to get to his house via a short cut beside the prison's western walls. But on all the occasions that I visited him, I chose to take a long roundabout way so as to avoid travelling near the forbidding building. A government servant like me never dreamt of visiting it, let alone becoming an AT (Awaiting Trial) occupant within its four walls. It was, however, to be my destiny.

One night in the Ipoh Central Police Station lock-up, an FSS Officer called out several names from a list. We were given a few moments to gather our worldly possessions before being led in single file to a British army truck waiting in the compound. This travel to an unknown destination in a pitch-dark night reminded me of my convoy travel with Fujiwara Kikan from Gopeng to Kampar at the beginning of the Japanese invasion. Like a Malay proverb, "A cut in the hand is visible, but who can detect a hurt in the heart?" As the truck, almost entirely constructed of steel, except for its tyres, rumbled and grunted, all the nerves running in my already feeble body shook along with it. As it turned out, we were being transferred to the Batu Gajah Prison, thirty miles south-west of Ipoh. When we arrived at the prison, its monstrous gate opened up and swallowed us whole. When it would disgorge us no one could tell.

In the prison's administrative wing, our thumbprints as well as palm-prints were taken as if we were common criminals. Our bodies were thoroughly searched. Everything, except what was stuck to our body, was taken away, recorded in a book and kept in a storeroom. We were next ordered to walk briskly in single file towards another block. Along the way, we were instructed to pick up and carry with us a kind of rubber pail that smelled disgusting. Groping in the dark, each detainee with a rubber night-soil pail, we were herded into the block through a steel door

that shut with a thunderous clang. We were immediately in a corridor with cells on both sides. A warder on duty told me to enter the one on the left, while my good newly found friend, an Indian Police Inspector, was allocated the cell opposite.

So, one by one, Tahir, Raja Omar, Eng Bah, Abdul Ghani, Mansur, Ibrahim, a few Chinese and several Punjabi Japanese Police Inspectors entered their new homes. For how long, no one had a clue. The Punjabis no longer kept long hair and beards; the Japanese Occupation had obviously brought social changes to Punjabis who served the Japanese Police. During the British era, under stringent Police laws Sikh members could be dismissed for cutting a strand of hair or beard. My cell door was shut with a loud bang. Had the door been shut by anyone else but a warder, I would have shouted. In the dark, my knees bumped into a low wooden platform. Unable to do anything in the dark, I had no choice but to sleep on the platform with my head on a cement slab pillow.

When the sun introduced its faithful self into my cell the next morning, I began to inspect my new surroundings. But what was there to inspect? The cell was only twelve feet by six feet; I recalled canaries held captive in cages. Along one wall was a platform of rough, unplanned planks and at its end a ledge of cement that became my pillow for several months. It was in this prison cell that I recalled a Muslim cleric's description of a grave as 'narrow, dark and completely silent'. In this cell, I experienced all three. Apart from being dark and stinking, bed bugs, mosquitoes, cockroaches, ants, and rats the size of my arm roamed freely.

The rubber pail we brought in with us was for our personal waste products. A bath was allowed once a day and with not more than one pail of water each. The cell's wooden door, about four inches thick, featured a tiny opening which we called a 'spy-hole'. Through these openings warders could take a peep at us. And through them we could see the eyeballs of our friends blinking away in the opposite cell if they happened to be peering out too. A small window with thick rusty bars, located high above our heads, was the only other opening. I was unable to climb up to look out the window as my legs were feeble, but some of my friends could even perch on the window ledge.

Therefore, my view of the outside world through this window was limited to that of coconut fruits and shoots, but not its trunk. On clear, balmy nights, I could see stars, bright and not so bright, drifting past the window as they silently crossed the night sky, the sky and everything there that was God's creation. Although the plank-bed we slept on was coarse, this was a far cry from the Kuala Kangsar lock-up where our beds were tables of brick and cement, exactly like tables on which fish were

displayed in the wet markets. Nevertheless, all three detention sites I experienced were disgusting and appalling! Months of sleeping on a coarse plank-bed and a cement-slab pillow left lasting physical effects. When I left the prison, the skin around my ankle was considerably thickened. The back of my neck was almost as thick as that of cart-pulling bullocks. Till today these parts of my body are prone to skin disorders.

After our names were called out, our doors were opened and closed one by one. We emerged attached to our stinking rubber pails. A Punjabi warder shouted in Malay, but with a heavy Punjabi accent, "Sit down in fours. Sit down in fours. Not like goats!" He then made a headcount using his baton. I saw it almost hit Tahir's head. On our doors were painted AT (Awaiting Trial) followed by numbers. One day we protested against the Bangladeshi warder's unkindly treatment, quoting that we were not prisoners but AT detainees, but he responded, "AT or prisoners, all are the same to me!" This warder could sleep while standing up and was an opium addict.

Each morning, we were pulled out of our cells, assembled for the headcount and sent to the courtyard through a steel door. Again, the warder reminded, "Walk in fours, not like goats!" We were then to sit under a shed. As we were not asked to do any work, we sat, day in and day out, talking and joking. But our eyes would wildly follow smoking British soldiers, just to see where they threw their cigarette butts. Every day, we were locked in from 4.00 pm till 8.00 am the next morning. Luckily my cell was on the ground floor or it would have been hell for my weak legs.

There was a detainee who worried incessantly about being killed by the British. One day, Tahir asked him, "Did you commit any crime?" The pessimist answered like a shot, "No!" So Tahir responded, "Should you be killed, you would die a martyr and your reward would be a sure entry to heaven." Before the pessimist could ask further, Tahir concluded with a smile, "But, according to Islamic religious teachers, God is most selective in choosing candidates for martyrdom. Not like the looks of you!" Someone interrupted cheerily, "So, chances are we will be set free?!" From then on, the pessimist's morose face appeared slightly pink, with hope.

Each afternoon, we were returned to our cells in the same grand manner we went out. In fours and carrying our night-soil pail with the obese warder shouting, "Get in and bring your shit-pail too!" Regardless if one was a MCS Officer, a Co-operative Officer, a lecturer, a Police Inspector or a communist, one had to carry his own 'shit-pail'. We were all equal within prison walls and we mixed freely regardless of status.

This was our program, day in and day out, but then, what was there in our 'shit-pail'? How much food did we consume? Our daily diet consisted of only two pieces of boiled tapioca served with some stingray cartilage. No one knew where the fish meat went.

As for vegetables, it was always pumpkin. We were inclined to believe that pumpkin was specially chosen by the white man to weaken our libido, so most detainees, especially the older ones, decided to forgo eating pumpkin lest we become impotent. This nagging concern was one day voiced by Tahir, who diplomatically asked a Malay warder, "Enchik Mastan, there is something that is worrying us older detainees. 'That', and the pumpkin diet. What will happen to us?" Enchik Mastan replied, with just as much tact, "Oh, 'that' concern! Don't worry! Once you are released, once you are able to smell some fragrance, you will realise your worry is groundless." His answer was worth a million dollars. It gave us (detainees) hope. Hope of getting out, hope of resuming a normal life with our family and hope of continuing with our life, which had been temporarily put on hold.

We were never given sugar or milk, except once. We were treated to milked tea on the day the FSS Officer's car was stoned by some Chinese boys as he was driving back from Ipoh. After that rude awakening, the FSS Officer paid more attention to our concern about the Bintang Tiga. Tea was plentiful, as tea-leaves came from a garden in the compound. We were, however, perpetually hungry. When my hunger was unbearable, I would drink lots of water to calm my growling stomach.

Among the prison dwellers was a strange Malay man who would not stay put in a place and would not befriend anyone. He looked alarmed just before a rainfall, especially if it was accompanied by thunder and lightning. He would tear blades of grass off the ground and stick them behind his ears. Nightly, when the clock struck twelve, he would scream his head off until a warder came to shut him up. One morning, I noticed him walking about as if looking for something, until he found an old rusty nail. After that we no longer heard his midnight screams. According to Malay beliefs, a rusty nail under one's pillow keeps evil spirits at bay. He was apparently an executioner, or a 'head-chopper' in common terms, arrested in Bruas, Perak. I heard he was tried and sentenced to ten years imprisonment for causing pain to civilians.

Also on the ground floor were several former members of the Japanese Police, including Abdul Ghani and Mansur, a former Malay Regiment soldier. Abdul Ghani was released and later became a Police Inspector, but Mansur was hanged for killing a Chinese in Kampar during the Japanese Occupation.

A Chinese detainee, accused of caning civilians while serving in the Japanese Police, was sentenced to ten years. I also came across a Chinese who was said to have become immensely wealthy while working with the Japanese Police. I was puzzled to see a new and pretty face visiting him each day. They turned out to be his 'wives'. Eleven of them!

Detainees from Sungai Manik¹

An interesting group in the Batu Gajah Prison hailed from Sungai Manik, Teluk Anson, including my Agricultural Assistant friend, Zakaria bin Abdul Raof.² This group of Malays, who had been transferred to the prison from the Bidor lock-up, did not socialise with us detainees from the Ipoh lock-up. They were led by a 'caliph', an ancient man not less than a hundred years old, always seen leaning against one of the shed's pillars. When a British officer freely labelled me 'a Japanese collaborator', I asked him, with my finger pointing towards the old man, "But look at that old man? Don't tell me he is a Japanese collaborator too?" The officer responded, also with a question, "So, what is he in for?" I replied, "It is your job to investigate!"

With some effort, I managed to befriend one young man from this strange Sungai Manik group. After I swore not to leak his story out, he told me that they were all rice farmers in Sungai Manik. After the Japanese surrender, their village was attacked by a group of armed Bintang Tiga members demanding money, rice and food. Consequently, many innocent Malays were killed. Enraged, these Sungai Manik Malays vowed not to be intimidated into submission. Though weaponless, they prepared to face the Bintang Tiga with bare hands. On a certain day, they stealthily swam across a river to attack and overwhelm the enemies and their machine-gun positions. The young man described excitedly, "I was shot in the head, but it was just like a bee sting. I felt hot in the scalp, but was not hurt." He also revealed that my friend Zakaria had, in his possession, a white robe riddled with bullet holes front and back.

Once, after a *maghrib* prayer at dusk, soft incantations of Qur'anic verses floated into my cell from the block that held the Sungai Manik detainees. It got increasingly louder, and finally, it reverberated as if a thousand men were chanting. My hair stood on end, my left cheek thickened, and I was deeply affected by the spirited chanting. I told myself, "Keep on chanting, Sungai Manik group, keep on chanting. Let the doors of the prison break down; let the walls crumble; and we shall be free!" Several warders rushed in with weapons, ordering the chanters to shut up. Deathly silence fell upon us once again. Only the patrolling

warders' footsteps broke the night's ghostly silence. I learned to visualise how these Sungai Manik Malays spiritually and mentally prepared themselves to face their foes. Not long after the chanting episode, all the Sungai Manik detainees were sent home in army trucks. I kept thinking about them long after they were gone. I still do.

There were several Kempeitai detectives in prison. One had eleven wives, others about four each. They were lucky that the British had arrested them before the Bintang Tiga could get to them. Otherwise, they would just be statistics. We were living in an upside down Malaya, where the mighty turned meek and the weak gained power.

Apart from cigarettes, I sorely missed reading and writing. I was almost at wit's end. It was a cruel mental torture. Each time I managed to get hold of bits of newspaper, mostly dated ones used to wrap food with, I would relish every word. Sometimes I would write or draw pictures in the sand out in the prison yard.

Smoking

Detainees were not allowed to smoke. To me, a heavy smoker, cigarettes were of utmost importance. Without it, my brain cells went unlit, my vision and hearing in the doldrums and my taste buds negative. Whenever the sweet aroma of cigarettes smoked by white officers floated into my nostrils, every cell in my body screamed for a cigarette. That was how terribly nicotine gripped a smoker. While sitting in the shed, our eyeballs would follow British soldiers' every move. We watched them not out of fear or love, but we were interested in the object that lay between their two lips.

Where would they throw the butts? If they threw them on to the ground and then walk away, one of us would slowly pick it up. If still lit, we would lengthen the butt with a piece of paper and share it among three or four people. If the butt was dead, we would undo it, roll the tobacco in another piece of paper and share it. We had to remind each other not to inhale more than two puffs, but often, before it could get to the third person, the tobacco was all used up. What could be expected of a cigarette with such a tiny amount of tobacco but inhaled with great gusto? There was a white soldier who would smoke his cigarettes almost to the end, throw it down and then ground it with his boot, leaving absolutely nothing for us. We despised this mean fellow!

Once, a friend gave me one whole 'Kooa' (Japanese) cigarette that I hid in my coat's lining. I was thrilled when the warder inspecting us at the steel door did not find it. It was my lucky day indeed – one whole

cigarette to myself in my cell! How should I smoke it? Just a quarter? Or one half? Leave some for tomorrow? Why is the warder still around? When was he going to get lost? As soon as I heard the warder's boots leave and the door shut with a clang, I picked up my coconut-frond broom and pretended to be sweeping. If anyone were to hear the sound of a match being lit, he would think the sound came from the sweeping.

I pulled the cigarette out of its hiding place and lovingly ran it under my nose to enjoy its aroma. I then pulled out one tiny matchstick and striker from their hiding place in my shirt cuff. Sitting cross-legged on the cement floor, I positioned the cigarette to my lips and carefully lit it. Where would I find another match? I must not be like the story of two men; one had a cigarette but no light and the other a match but no cigarette.

Nothing was more satisfying in this world than the refreshing feeling of cigarette smoke coursing through a smoker's lungs, brain, and out through the nostrils! All my senses jumped alive. I swept the floor once more, this time with one hand fanning the smoke so that it would not leave my window in great swirls. After smoking about half, I decided to smoke it in another position, this time while lying down with one leg on the other knee. Trying out three different positions, I completed smoking most of it. I then lengthened the butt with a piece of paper and smoked till the very last grain of tobacco. I could not decide which position gave the most satisfying smoke.

A non-smoking Sitiawan Chinese boy Eng Bah, understood my craving for tobacco. He gave me Chinese tobacco *anghun*, which he had smuggled into the cell by hiding the package in between his buttocks. No warder would inspect us there. I am revealing all these little secrets because I know current detainees are allowed to smoke. My social status plunged when I smoked *anghun*, but it was better than nothing. Eng Bah further helped me by making a fuse at the end of a string made by twining coconut husk. He kept the fuse lit under his platform four doors away. Whenever I gave a signal for the fuse, he would throw the fuse, which was wound around a small stone to his neighbour's cell, from where the fuse was passed from one cell to the next until it reached mine. When I was done, it would be returned to him by the same method. What team spirit!

Each morning, before the sun could reach us through the bars of the high window, Eng Bah's voice would break the still of the morning with lovely Malay tunes whose lyrics have somewhat been coloured lurid. He was a detainee inherited by the British from the Japanese. He had earlier been recruited as an assistant in the Japanese Army in Lumut, Perak. But

soon after he learned how to handle arms, he bolted with one. He was consequently arrested and detained by the Japanese, but their surrender saved him from execution. I would love to meet this person who did a lot for me in prison.

Here is my last tale about cigarettes. My friend Zakaria received a bowl of rice and curry from home and invited me to join him. As he scooped the rice and fish curry, he discovered a packet of Japanese cigarettes under the rice. As he was a non-smoker, the pack was mine. I was like a child lost in a candy store. I dried the soggy cigarettes in the sun, waiting on the spot to make sure no warder found them or someone else pinched them. I re-rolled the tobacco with newspaper and shared them with my friends. Although the cigarettes tasted exactly like fish curry, we smoked them and imagined they were 'Kooa'.

Another dreadful torture was my craving for news of my family. Were they well? Did they have enough food? Enough money? I was sure my father would visit them. Should they be in danger, I was sure my father would move them elsewhere. Sometimes I saw their faces in my dreams. I was convinced that among the myriad stars that embellished the night sky visible through my high window, one was our guardian star.

In the Batu Gajah Prison, I was 'AT 86' ('Awaiting Trial 86'). I was reduced to just two digits. Through the prison gate we saw civilians passing by on bicycles, on foot and in cars. For us held captive, everyone outside the prison looked happy. At least they were free. Needless to say, we were constantly humiliated but we swallowed our hurt with grit. We also worked hard to ensure that our friends' spirits would not be too severely dampened by despair and dejection.

Lal Bahadur Shastri's Visit

Prison life was incredibly monotonous, except for one day in 1945 when Lal Bahadur Shastri came from India to visit IIL (Indian Independence League) and INA (Indian National Army) detainees. A famous lawyer in India, he was later elected Prime Minister after Jawaharlal Nehru. He died in Tashkent and his body was taken home to India. Shastri was on a fact-finding mission; to gauge treatment meted out by the British to Indian detainees, their crimes, charges against them and appropriate line of action to defend them based on international law. I commented to my friends, "See, India is interested to investigate the fate of their freedom fighters. But who had come to see us Malay detainees?"

A friend, well versed in law, gave us some free advice. He said, "If there are allegations, we should answer this way. 'When the British

retreated south and crossed border-town Tanjung Malim at the beginning of the Japanese invasion, we, Perak state subjects were no longer under the British administration. Therefore, our activities after that should not be British concern except for war crimes.' That is our best defence. Do not dream anyone will come to defend us like Lal Shastri is doing for the Indians!" Another detainee interrupted, "Why are the British so unfair and cruel? They should have defended Malaya. Instead, they fled, leaving us to the Japanese. Now, we are at fault! Where is justice?"

Unable to pin down a definite charge against Indian detainees and not wanting to aggravate the 'Jai Hind' call reverberating in India, Indian detainees were released. Shastri's visit was fruitful. If the Indians were found not guilty in their political and military activities to free their motherland, why then did the British punish us Malays for less serious wrong-doings?

Japanese Prisoners

Now, let me touch on yet another group of the Batu Gajah Prison dwellers. They came from the Far East, from The Land of the Rising Sun. These samurais had deflated the British ego in February 1942, but now the British has returned to Asia and other parts of the world with a vengeance.

I once drew a samurai sword after pressing a button. As sharp as razor blades, they were said to be 'plated' with human blood. A Japanese would not draw one unless it was to be fed with blood. Luckily no Japanese saw me draw the sword or I might have been decapitated. The samurai sword is very different from the swords carried by British Officers. It had a long hilt for easy grip with both hands and used mostly for chopping. Both the Japanese and British Officers used their swords to give order to their troops. One would say 'Yat!' and the other 'Charge!' The sharpness and weight of the samurai sword is evident by the one movement needed to chop a head, just like the guillotine. British Officers' swords are kind of blunt and not sharp enough for killing. More for show, for parades and ceremonial events.

The power held by this Eastern race ended on 15 August 1945. After massive losses of lives in Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, Japan bowed in abject defeat. Prior to that, the call of '*kurrah*' (come quickly) from sentry guards could curdle our blood. Very few could say they had never been slapped by Japanese sentry guards. Now, all Japanese '*kakkas*' (bosses) were being transported into the Batu Gajah Prison to swell its population. A perfect example of a twist of fate!

These newcomers were still in uniforms, some carrying socks filled with rice. They, however, disappeared soon after arriving. The next morning, while we hippie-looking old-timers were herded out 'not like goats, and in fours', we saw Japanese detainees in loincloths running in circles. They were later made to run farther and faster, all the time led by an Indian exercise leader. Laggards were rapped with batons, ever so gently, never hard knocks. Each morning and afternoon, we watched this Japanese circus with grave concern, worried we would be likewise ordered to perform. But we never had to.

A detainee, formerly serving in the Japanese Police force pointed towards a Japanese prisoner, "That's Konnichika, Perak Chief Police Officer!" Another detainee identified Yoshimura, the most dreaded Kempeitai man in Ipoh. "He had thrashed many a victim," he added quietly. I think these senior Japanese officials were taken into custody for 'a dose of their own medicine' before being tried for war crimes.

Lucky Yoshimura, assigned as kitchen-help, remained plump and healthy, but his friends were soon reduced to walking skeletons, as they had to endure great hunger in contrast to sumptuous consumption of food prior to the surrender. I daresay the British Officer-in-Charge at the Batu Gajah Prison was the most talented slimming expert. Within three months, the once fat and often obese Japanese were skeletons whose ribs stuck out like firewood sticks. The slimming secret lay with the Military Intelligence Chief, but I could guess.

Japanese detainees were billeted on the top floor where it was coldest at night, without blankets and with millions of bed bugs. I guess they were not fed sugar (just like us) and salt. They were fed food as little as ours, yet they had to perform strenuous exercises, as required by international law. I did not once see British Officers lay a finger on the Japanese. Neither were they anywhere near. Everything was carried out by their favourites, the Indians. Yoshimura was nabbed by Indian soldiers in the act of smuggling rice hidden between his bottom and his loincloth. The rice was meant for his hungry boss, the Kempeitai Chief for Ipoh. The Japanese were so hungry that rice hidden in such a location on a man's body would still be eaten. I don't know what punishment was meted out to Yoshimura.

A Blessing in Disguise

Although the Japanese Occupation was described as one of severe hardship and brutality, it left something positive, a sweet fruit to be plucked and enjoyed only after the surrender. Before the Occupation, Malays were just learning to understand politics and were just beginning to press for freedom and Independence. But Japan's clarion call of 'Asia

for the Asians' gave Malays a new breath of confidence and stirred in them a resounding love for 'country and people'. This was nationalism; from there efforts towards Independence began to flower.

The victory of an Asian race encouraged nationalists all over Asia to charge ahead and challenge Western economic and political might. For so many centuries, Asians were stifled and intimidated and subjugated into humiliation. But the Japanese proved that invincible Britain could be brought to its knees at the feet of an Asian race. The crippling sense of fear and reverence for the West waned, supplanted by a new spirit that Asians could be equal to the white men. Japanese victory opened the eyes of Malay nationalists and encouraged them to stand up and to seize power from the West.

In this way, the Japanese Occupation had touched Malay lives, bringing positive attitudinal changes. When the British returned to rule Malaya in 1945, they no longer faced Malays of the pre-war mould. They were confronted instead by a Malay community whose souls and spirits were no longer static and no longer accepting. Britain had to devise new ways to rule the Malays, to subdue and damper their nationalistic fervour. This led to the Malayan Union, a proposal fraught with politically debilitating elements to impede Malay moves towards progress. Malays who have learned to understand British ploys and ruses rejected the Malayan Union and moved ahead towards their aspirations, Independence. In short, post-war Malays were a breed with new-found strength, more belief in themselves, higher self-esteem, less 'reverence' for white men, more conscious of their political rights and possessing steel-like resolve to determine their own future.

My Father's Visits

Several times my beloved father travelled by timber lorries and bullock carts to visit me in prison. Old and sick, his heart was still bleeding from losing two sons. Both my immediate older brother Alli and my immediate younger brother Yahaya had been killed by the MPAJA.

My wife never came. My father, who did not want her to see the squalor I was living in, did not bring her. Batu 20 folks continued to assist my family during my imprisonment and I shall be eternally grateful to these noble souls.

District Police Officer J. Birch

While in prison I met two Malay constables from Bagan Datoh who had been arrested on charges pressed against them by the Chinese. When the

two found out my full name and my pre-war profession, they disclosed that District Police Chief J. Birch had gone to Taiping to arrest me in December 1941. But due to the Japanese lightning advance, he had to leave Taiping. He later rushed to Teluk Anson to take action against Police Inspector Yahaya who was away without leave but was intercepted by the Japanese and killed.

My Release

Detained without any mention of a trial, I often asked the FSS Officer about my case but received no satisfactory answer. I was already looking like a hippie. One day I was asked to come out. I thought it was my release, especially when many fellow detainees had already left. The one with numerous wives was one of the earliest to depart.

After collecting my belongings that were kept in a storeroom, I was taken in a truck back to the Ipoh Central Police Station lock-up where I was once an 'honourable guest'. I was thrilled to see a man I had known while moving with the Fujiwara Kikan. Hamzah A Cunard was with the IIL (Indian Independence League) and I with the KMM then. We were able to talk for only two days because as soon as British Intelligence got wind that we were birds of a feather, we were instantly separated. Although they shut our mouths, our eyes played the role of our mouths.

Although we were not allowed to talk, no one stopped us from sharing food sent by Hamzah's family. Police constables at the station did not have the heart to stop me from sharing food because they saw how feeble I had become. Furthermore, very few senior officers have reported for duty. Many more had been detained by the BMA on charges of complicity with the Japanese administration and brutality. Able to enjoy meat and chicken, my skin-and-bones body began to fill out. I began to recall warder Mastan's words often.

After two weeks in the Ipoh Central Police Station, I was invited to meet the British Military Intelligence Chief in Ipoh. I was made to stand outside his office for hours to teach me a lesson, to show me who was master, and to make me a more submissive man by the time I entered his room. Holding a letter in his hand, he asked if and how I knew Malay Regiment Education Officer Chikgu Abu Samah.³ My heart fluttered. Was the letter⁴ from Chikgu Abu Samah, whom I assisted after the fall of Singapore? He must have written to the BMA! I explained that I knew Chikgu Abu Samah long before the war. As fate had it, I met him again soon after the capitulation of Singapore where he was minding hundreds of hungry Malay soldiers and family members. It was there

that I gave them money and food before arranging their return to mainland Malaya.

The officer asked, "How many white men did you assist?" I replied, "None". He wanted to know why not. I said, "I did not have the opportunity to do so. You must think for yourself. I have to take care of the Malays, my people, first. Furthermore, what would the Japanese say if I helped white men?!" This officer gave the impression Malay lives were worthless. He also did not wish to see me freed. He would have liked me to be hanged. I saw all that in his eyes. He then tossed me a telegram stating that my eldest daughter was seriously ill, and asked, "Would you like to go home?!" I said "Yes," with earnestness, especially after seeing that the telegram bore a much earlier date. "If you want to go home, sign this statement!" pushing a document under my nose. I read the prepared text. It was an admission of crime for having been with the Japanese. It was Hobson's choice. There was also another statement that I would not leave my house without permission from the British Intelligence Chief in Taiping. This British Officer looked ready to slurp my blood if he could! What more did he expect? Was it not good enough that a Malay had helped his own people?

Before leaving, I asked him to thoroughly investigate my case. If I was guilty, I was willing to accept any sentence after a fair trial. I admitted that I was with the Japanese, but if he himself was invited by six armed Japanese, he too would have gone with them. 'No use farting against thunder'. The British Government was irresponsible; they had fled Malaya when they were the ones entrusted to defend it. After a heated exchange of words, I signed the documents under great stress and duress, with my daughter's face flashing across my eyes. I returned to my lock-up to bid my friends goodbye with a message, "Don't forget to arrange an AT Club gathering some day!"

Stepping out of the police lock-up, I inhaled a lung full of fresh air. Even fresh air seemed more delicious outside the prison compound. With \$4 in my pocket, I made my way to Ipoh town to look for my brother's friends, but none would come near me. They were too afraid. Dejected and despondent, I boarded a bus that had planks as steps and returned to Taiping. In the bus, a certain whiff flirted with my nostrils and I found warder Mastan's words one hundred percent accurate. In Taiping, I sought a Chinese man from Batu 20 who handed me \$10 without my asking. Malays would not even see me. Did it have something to do with my much-misunderstood war activities, or were the Malays I met truly penniless? Perhaps there were reasons I could not fathom.

From Taiping, I got a free ride to Batu 20 in a lorry carrying bananas. I arrived at my battered hut late at night. After calling out their names several times, my eldest girl said, “Mother, that sounds like father!” For as long as I live I cannot forget that sweet sentence. I was reunited with my family after being imprisoned for many dreadful months. For what and for whom?

Notes

1. *Red Star over Malaya* by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng (p. 230) recorded that the ‘Sungai Manik Incidents’ happened between August 15 and September 15, 1945. The names of the ‘caliphs’ were Imam Haji Bakri, Haji Marzuki and Haji Shukor.
2. With the help of his boss, I believe Mr R.J. Heith, Zakaria bin Abdul Raof, an Agricultural Assistant in Sungai Manik, was released from prison.
3. Chikgu Abu Samah, from Negeri Sembilan, was a teacher at Seremban’s King George V School before becoming Malay Regiment’s Education Officer. I knew him through my brother-in-law, Major Ismail bin Tahar.
4. Chikgu Abu Samah’s letter read in part: “I, Chikgu Abu Samah, Malay Regiment’s Education Officer would like to inform you that after the fall of Singapore to the Japanese, hundreds of Malay soldiers and family members were in my care. We have not received our salaries for two months and had no money.... Enchik Mustapha Haji Hussain came to Istana Kampung Gelam where we were taking refuge to give us money, rice and food which enabled us to survive until he (Mustapha) was able to arrange our travel home to our respective villages....”

Arrested Again (1946)

A day after returning to my hill-farm from the Batu Gajah Prison, I tried to resume my temporarily short-circuited life by assuming my paternal role. Although my wife had cared for our little ones to the best of her ability during my imprisonment, I found Ayesha, Hendun, Adelain and Dinah in need of medical attention, requiring at least a dose of deworming mixture. With some money from the sale of our farm produce, we travelled to Taiping town to buy some medicine, and spent the rest on food.

Not long after, my father delivered a copy of Chikgu Abu Samah's letter – the very one the British Military Intelligence Chief had waved in front of me. With tears brimming in my eyes, I read the precious document that had secured my freedom, moved by commendations from a man I had helped in all sincerity. At least, there was one Malay, among the many I had assisted, bold enough to repay my deeds by writing a letter explaining the truth. At that time, the majority of Malays on the British Government's payroll were deeply afraid of getting entangled with someone like me, a man branded a Japanese spy.

The Dutch Intelligence Officer

Late one afternoon, a jeep stopped near the bridge, the nearest point it could get to my decrepit hut. During the Japanese Occupation, I was apprehensive of every Japanese vehicle that came anywhere near my hut. Now, I suffered pangs of anxiety as a white man's vehicle came within earshot of my farm. A uniformed white man and a rotund Malay boy emerged from the jeep. They entered my hut, which in spite of being propped up by several coconut palm trunks, was leaning dangerously to one side. Without waiting for an invitation, the pair seated themselves on my screw-pine mat. Being a farm hut, with no wall separating the sitting area from the kitchen, the two visitors could see my wife in the kitchen preparing lunch.

The white man in a Dutch military captain's outfit had fair skin, but it was not reddish like the complexion of many Englishmen I knew. He had an accent, but it was almost untraceable. As he unfolded a memo retrieved from his pocket, I stole a glance at its letterhead. From there, I guessed that the captain was from the Netherlands Indies Civilian Administration (NICA), the Dutch government in colonial Indonesia. The captain made a generous offer, "You are an educated Malay. It is not befitting for you and your family to live in this god-forsaken place," pointing to my wife bent over a firewood stove. "I have been instructed to persuade you to work for us... NICA Intelligence. Your service would be most helpful in eradicating anti-Dutch elements in Malaya."

If I agreed, he was willing to pay me a \$1,000 monthly salary, in addition to providing a house in town, and food supply thrown in. He assured me, "It is not a difficult task at all. For example, at this very moment, the NICA would like to keep track of Persatuan Indonesia Merdeka (the Independent Indonesia Association)." "There are some people in Taiping who are interested in Indonesia's political struggle. We need to know about them. For example, we want more information on Raja Din, now working at the Food Control Office. That is all for the moment!" I declined his offer outright without giving any reason. Noticing my twisted facial expression, the Malay boy (who was later to become a village headman) began to get the jitters, claiming he had nothing to do with the offer and that he was only there to show the white officer my hut. He left immediately, as he knew of my temperament.

The English-speaking Dutch officer was not prepared to leave empty handed. He reiterated his offer. This time, I raised my voice, "What? You are asking me to stab the Indonesians in the back?" He replied, as if surprised, "What is wrong with that?" I glared at him and shouted, "What is wrong? If someone asked you to work with the Nazis while they occupied Holland, would you?" He immediately responded, "Of course not!" I added just as quickly, "As it is with me!" Still not ready to give up, he said, "But you have nothing to do with the Indonesian people!" With hands clenched, and glancing meaningfully at my long machete resting against a wall near us, I replied, "Nothing to do with them? They are my cousins!" The Dutch Officer left in a real hurry. There I was, trying to lead a normal life, but there were obviously parties keen to use me to destroy my own people.

Arrested and Paraded Again

Days turned to weeks. I continued to till my farm, convinced that the Malay proverb; "be good to the soil, and it will reward you" could not

be truer. My primary concern was to rebuild my health, which had suffered in prison. But my peace of mind was once again disturbed by the arrival of yet another jeep, this time carrying a British officer. What now?! Was I being arrested again? For what? By whom? Many questions were playing in my mind. The officer came up to my hut. He had to climb up to my hut, as the steps were a series of small round logs with no railings. Without wasting time, he ordered me to follow him to Ipoh that instant.

Once again, I bid goodbye to my petrified family. They were completely unprepared for this. After all, I had just been released from prison. My wife's face was drained of blood and her throat voiceless. But what could I tell her? What in the world could a man in this predicament tell his wife? Before leaving, I pleaded with the officer not to handcuff me in front of my family. I refused to have them see me thus humiliated. I requested that if he were to handcuff me, to please wait till we had left Batu 20 village, so I could wave to my friends, to let them know I was not being arrested. He said nothing, although he did not handcuff me, and continued to drive the jeep until we reached Ipoh.

Once again I had to stand and like a guilty man wait outside a British office in Ipoh, until someone said, "I want you to go to Kuala Lumpur. Our man will be waiting for you at the Kuala Lumpur Train Station. Sorry, we are not able to give you a first class ticket. Would you be willing to travel second class?" Utterly bewildered, I replied "Yes". How come I was treated with such respect? They were considering giving me a first class ticket! Was it a trick to lure me to Kuala Lumpur for the slaughter? When the time came, I was sent clambering onto a train with neither an escort nor handcuffs. This was odder still! Why didn't they just come straight out and tell me if I was a friend or foe? Spasms of mental torture kept me awake throughout the journey from Ipoh to Kuala Lumpur.

War Crimes Section

As promised, a British escort in a jeep was waiting for me at the Kuala Lumpur Train Station. I don't remember this escort's attitude towards me. After a short exchange of pleasantries, I was driven to an office at the Sulaiman Building, where the bold lettering of 'WAR CRIMES SECTION' on its door hit me in the face. In my heart I sighed, "This is it. I am finished!"

I instantly recalled a Chinese fellow-detainee who had been tried for war crimes and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. At the same time, I remembered clearly the advice of Enchik Tahir, a detainee well-versed in legal matters, who had assured us, "If we had not committed any crime,

we need not worry. There is nothing they can do to us!” Raja Omar, also well-versed in law, was not forthcoming with advice as he felt he would not even be able to save himself.

So many thoughts flitted across my mind as I stood outside the office, with no one I knew to help me except a man who wore a leather wristband. If I am not wrong, he was a son of a Mr Tallala of Kuala Lumpur. But could he help me? After thumbing through files of reports, an Officer inside the office shouted to my escort, “No. Sorry. We have got nothing against him.” What a relief! But it was only a short-lived respite! Within minutes, I was taken away to yet another place.

British Military Intelligence Headquarters

The British escorting officer took me to a two-storey building set amidst the greenery of Kuala Lumpur Lake Gardens. If I remember right, it is where the Parliament stands now. As soon as I arrived under its porch, several British officers and men shouted repeatedly, “Here he comes!” They then rushed down the stairs to shake my hand. I did not know what it was all about. I was confused. Was I dreaming? I was ushered into a bedroom, which they later locked from the outside.

I took advantage of this privacy to retrieve a handkerchief from my pocket; it contained a small piece of benzoic acid already blessed by a religious man. My friend Hamzah A. Cunard, who had given it to me sometime ago, had assured me, “You use this, Mustapha. They (the opponent) can’t do anything to you.” I pretended to wipe my perspiration with the ‘blessed’ handkerchief. Stealing glances in a mirror, I noticed my tired face turning red. I recited a few Qur’anic verses and repeated my friend’s mantra, “However big you (the enemy) are, Allah’s Messenger Prophet Mohammed is greater.” Like magic, I gained a new surge of mental and spiritual strength; my confidence and resolve mounted. I was ready to take on several giants, with my heart fearless and my head cool.

Later, I was sent into a room where four senior British officers, the most junior a major, sat opposite me. They started the interrogation with questions on KMM before World War II. Was there a KMM branch in Kota Bharu, Kelantan? What was KMM’s role in the War? Did KMM bring benefits to the Japanese military? If so, what were they? Was it true that Fujiwara Kikan was already in Kota Bharu, Kelantan, before the Invasion? Did KMM contact the Japanese prior to the War? When and how? Who played a vital role? Their fielding of questions indicated their legal backgrounds; they were perhaps lawyers and public prosecutors. The questions seemed straightforward and direct enough, but they were

all dangerous. They kept coming, one after another, close together. It was a Herculean task, but with quiet resolve and determination, I managed to extricate myself from all the traps, one by one.

The next question focused on KMM's President Ibrahim Yaakub. Did I know Ibrahim was a Japanese spy? How come I did not know? Was I not a member of the same organisation? Impossible that the Vice President did not know the activities of the President! They claimed Ibrahim received money from the Japanese to buy over the *Warta Malaya Press* for anti-British propaganda. I replied I knew nothing about that; Ibrahim was a very secretive person. No one knew what he was up to. Even his good friend in Singapore, Ishak Haji Muhammad, did not know. There was no point in arresting Ishak.

Halfway through the interrogations, one of the officers lost his cool after a little provocation. He blurted resentfully, "The damned Japs flew him (Ibrahim) to Jogjakarta!" This was the piece of news I had been waiting for. It came from the horse's mouth! No longer mere rumours! I knew for sure then that Ibrahim was already in Indonesia. That being so, it would be less difficult for me to secure the release of my KMM friends, many of whom were detained in the Kuala Lumpur Pudu Jail. I carried on answering all questions.

From the interrogation, I discovered that many prominent KMM members had escaped arrest; Ishak Haji Muhammad, Pak Chik Ahmad and Ahmad Boestamam. Dr Burhanuddin – not a KMM member, but active in Malay politics – was also free. In fact, while I was 'resting' in the Batu Gajah Prison, news of him and some of our friends' founding the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) reached me through the cracks in the prison's brick walls.

Back to the British Military Intelligence interrogation; the officers 'seemed' satisfied with my answers. Nevertheless, I sensed a deep-seated vengeance simmering beneath; how dare a native son oppose a mighty colonial master? They had little choice but to feign satisfaction; a petition signed by 400 Malay Regiment soldiers led by Major Ibrahim bin Alla Ditta, MC, had reached the British Military Administration. The petition explained my assisting and saving the lives of many Malay soldiers stranded in Singapore after the British defeat.¹ I did not know of this petition until thirty years later (on 17 November 1975) when I met Major Ibrahim again. He told me 400 Malay Regiment soldiers had signed a petition recounting my assistance to them and requested the British not to take action against me. It then dawned on me why the British officers and men had shouted, "Here he comes!" when I arrived at the British military intelligence headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

C. Ff. Sheppard (Tan Sri Datuk Haji Mubin Sheppard)

It was a long parade. I was taken next to the Department of Public Relations for Peninsular Malaya to see its Chief, Mr C. Ff. Sheppard, a Malayan Civil Service Officer. I had had the privilege to meet him once before, prior to the War, when he was visiting the School of Agriculture in Serdang. As an energetic young officer with great personal ambition and national aspirations, I had received Mr Sheppard with enthusiasm and reverence, after having waited so anxiously for this officer well-known for his pro-Malay attitude (another pro-Malay Englishman at that time was Mr T.S. Adams, British Resident for Selangor). After escorting him around the classrooms, individual farms and common farms, we had chatted in the Common Room. I don't remember what the topics were, but they definitely did not include politics, as the topic was taboo among British Government servants.

What constituted politics then was limited to the Malay Rulers' advice and calls from senior British Officers to the Malays to emulate the Chinese; to dabble in business and participate in the country's economic activities. These few points also formed the theme of Malay newspaper editorials, especially in *Majlis*. I was tired of such lectures. The Chinese were already known as businessmen, craftsmen, masons, inventors of gunpowder and compasses; they were part of the world's oldest civilisation. Had the Englishmen allowed the Chinese to conduct unrestricted business in England, as in Malaya, English businessmen would have had to pack up too. England would not have become 'The Nation of Shopkeepers'. Nevertheless, ways had to be found to overcome our weaknesses and make Malays a majestic and globally respected race.

Now, after being paraded from one colonial office to another, I was once again sitting opposite Mr Sheppard, this time in his new official capacity and brand-new department. His first question was, "What happened to Captain Raja Aman Shah?" I explained at great length that I did everything within my means to save the lives of all Malay fighting men and FMS Volunteers by appealing to the Japanese not to kill or detain them as Prisoners of War. I was able to help all but seven men, from Warrant Officer Class I to privates, and several other officers besides. I deeply regretted the unfortunate fact that these seven included Captain Raja Aman Shah. He listened to my story carefully and asked for my assistance. He even offered me a job in his new establishment. I had to decline, as I needed time to physically and mentally recover from my prison experience. I stopped elaborating on my prison ordeal when I remembered that Mr Sheppard also suffered great humiliation and depriva-

tion as an intern at a Japanese prison camp in Singapore. For three years and eight months, what Japanese hell did he not endure? I was lucky he would still talk to me, a man many branded as a traitor or at least a Japanese collaborator! After that meeting with Mr Sheppard, I was once again paraded. Where next? (Since December 1975, Mr Sheppard – now Tan Sri Datuk Haji Mubini Sheppard – and I have been corresponding, writing about Malay Regiment history during World War II.)

Meeting with the CID Chief of Malaya

Next I was driven to meet the CID Chief of Malaya and his Malay officers, Raja Ahmed Hisham (in 1989, Raja Datuk Sri, Raja Di Hilir Perak, second in line to the Perak throne), Jalaluddin Abu Bakar and Hashim Misai. This was where my hands were kissed by two CID officers, Jalaluddin and Hashim, for having saved their lives soon after Kuala Lumpur fell under Japanese control.²

Meeting the Director of Agriculture and Losing My Job

I was taken to yet another place – this time at my request – to meet my employer, the Director of Agriculture for Malaya. This meeting was to test the British ‘feeling’ towards me. If I were to be reinstated in my old position, I would take it that I was clear from all allegations. When I met the Director, he was wearing a Major’s uniform. Before my escorting officer could narrate my story, the Director shrieked, “What have you been doing during the Japanese Occupation?” Before I could open my mouth to reply, the escorting officer answered tersely, “Investigating is our responsibility. We found him not guilty. Your responsibility is to return his old job to him.” The Director’s face, which had been livid with anger, was now red with embarrassment. We left the office soon after.

As a consequence, I was dismissed from my position on the grounds that I left my job without leave. It was a most cruel decision as I had left my job on sick leave. A doctor’s certification, later sent as an appeal, was ignored. On my father’s advice, I appealed to the British Chief Secretary to the Government but his reply was disappointing – he was not going to interfere in a matter that had already been decided. It seemed I was ‘clean’ in the eyes of the British military but not to the civilian authorities.

The dismissal letter was like a samurai sword that had fallen on my neck. I could not look at my children’s faces. “Never mind! From now on, I must learn to feed on grass growing by the roadside as I could no longer hope to be fed with cut grass in a pen.”

Meeting with Sutan Jenain

The treatment accorded by the British Intelligence Officers was fine by me, but I still did not understand its origins. Was this sterling treatment to ‘soften my heart’ so I would disclose more information about KMM? Or was it because of Chikgu Abu Samah’s letter? Were there other letters? While sitting in the jeep, the British Captain kept discussing legal matters; he was genuinely interested in things judiciary. So, I grabbed this chance to use all the big words and legal terms I had picked up from detainee Enchik Tahir.

I found it difficult to fathom the minds of these military officers – nothing was spelled out in concrete terms – but I suspected the jeep was for my exclusive use. In the fashion of the many detective stories I had enjoyed, perhaps they were hoping I would ‘lead’ them to the homes of fellow political agitators. With that in mind, I requested to be taken to a house in Ujung Pasir, Kampung Baru, where the dwellers (my sister-in-law’s relatives) were completely apolitical. I had done them a good turn; I had managed to dissuade the Japanese occupying troops from commandeering their house when the Japanese entered Kuala Lumpur. Their palatial house, typical of homes belonging to elite Malays of the time, was of the exact kind the Japanese loved to convert into offices and accommodations, especially when it stood in the heart of the city.

I introduced the British escorting officer to these relatives, who hospitably invited us to lunch Malay-style as they were about to begin their meal. As we ate, I saw a man just outside one of the windows craning his neck to attract my attention. Who else could it be, if not Sutan Jenain? I was in a bind! Here I was in the process of cleansing my name from all anti-imperialistic politics, and now, the ‘father of communism’ was seeking me! Excusing myself, I went out to talk to him. I gave a short and precise instruction to the man, who was familiar with my cryptic messages, “Everything is fine. How are you? Come again tomorrow morning.”

It baffled me how this old man knew I was in Kuala Lumpur, and in a relative’s house at that. Perhaps that is why he was nicknamed ‘the globe-trotter’. He left the house with one ‘smile for all’. The hostess, who knew of Sutan Jenain’s political notoriety, sighed with relief. After that, I realised that wherever I went and whatever I did, many interested parties were watching me. After lunch, the British officer left, but not before reminding me to call if there was ‘anything important’. I sent him to the doorway, still confused. Was I completely free or was I merely between arrests? I suspected that the British were playing a game of cat-and-mouse with me.

As instructed, Sutan Jenain came the next day. I was, once again paraded, this time not in a jeep but on a bicycle. While cycling, I told Sutan of the steps I had devised and executed to ensure the safety of all KMM members. They were all my own. In critical moments, everyone had to devise his own. I also informed him that according to British Intelligence, Ibrahim had been flown to Jogjakarta by the Japanese military. It was official news. Furthermore, based on my explanations during the interrogations, the British no longer planned to arrest any of 'our boys'. In fact they were prepared to release those already detained, including Idris Hakim from Kuala Lumpur and Datuk Wan Daud of Terengganu.

Sutan Jenain was pleased that my strategy did not reek of compromise. "That is fine. You did not surrender yourself," he said. I also confided that my future was still uncertain as the British had not announced in specific terms whether I was fully cleared of all allegations. My case differed from that of Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmi who was not a KMM member and had not at any time confronted the British. My case was also unlike that of Ishak Haji Muhammad. Although Ishak was a KMM committee member, Ishak was already imprisoned when Malaya was invaded. He did not move south with the Japanese. Idris Hakim's case was the oddest. He was also imprisoned in Changi Jail like Ishak, yet re-arrested after the war was over and was currently being detained. I therefore suspected that Idris had been charged with allegations outside KMM matters. Perhaps it was the same with Datuk Wan Daud.

I concluded my recount of the interrogations by telling Sutan Jenain that despite everything, I believed the British Intelligence Officers. I was familiar enough with the British to know they would not renege on their word over such serious matters. The old man's face brightened with hope. He loved all Malay freedom fighters like his own children and this reassurance – that they would be unharmed – lightened the old man's heart. Sutan Jenain took me to meet old friends, but it was pointless. Everyone was afraid, worried and suspicious. Some did not want us to set foot inside their homes. Others pretended to be busy. I could not blame them, as the plague I carried was one that could trigger arrests and detentions. I told the old man so.

We thus cycled towards the hive of Malay nationalism, the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) office on the third floor of a shop-house along Batu Road (now Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman) near the P.H. Hendry Silver shop. As the white and red *Sang Saka Merah Putih* flag fluttered in the wind, my heart swelled with nationalistic pride. I saw three persons there, including Ahmad Boestamam, but I soon sensed a chill in the room. Was I making them uncomfortable? Was it discomfiting to sit across from

a recently released detainee? Or were these nationalists nervous over the presence of Sutan Jenain and his Malayan Communist Party connections? Perhaps we were both branded carriers of dreaded epidemics? I left the office feeling disturbed but not angry, for they were young and inexperienced in Malay political agitations.

After staying in Kuala Lumpur for several days, I returned to my farm. I don't remember who gave me the fare home. It was not Sutan Jenain; he was always penniless. That is my story. Apart from my father, from the time I was detained until my release Sutan Jenain was the only other person who bothered to check on me and my friends in Perak. No one else dared come near me or my family. I did not take this to heart because many political fighters were then not as experienced as other nationalists, like the Burmese.

In the 24 hours following my release from British supervision, I had violated all conditions imposed on me. This could not be helped. The struggle for Independence was a greater cause. We could not become another Asian community whose independence efforts were halted each time a leader was arrested or died. Upon my return to the hill-farm, I received not only my dismissal notification, but also an order of eviction from the bountiful land I had tilled with sweat and blood.³ The hill-farm had not only provided my livelihood, but also that of hundreds of others in the area.⁴

Notes

1. In *Red Star over Malaya* (p. 274), Dr Cheah Boon Kheng notes: "Mustapha Hussein was subsequently taken into custody, but several months later, after petitions were made to the BMA from several former members of the Malay Regiment whose lives he had saved from the Japanese, he was released."
2. Everything that took place in the room has been narrated in Chapter 22.
3. During the Japanese Occupation, Batu 20 folks called my hill-farm 'Che Mustapha's Hill'.
4. *Translator's note*: My father's imprisonment was cruel. My heart aches each time I read about how he was treated like a common criminal. Even if there was a charge against him (and he was never charged), it should have been a political one.

His job dismissal was unfair to say the least. He did not leave his job in December 1941, as he was on a long sick leave from 5 December after receiving treatment at the Kuala Lumpur Malay Hospital for a nerve disorder. Documents attesting to his sick leave and a doctor's certificate were left at the School of Agriculture in Serdang, but they must have been destroyed in the chaos of war. We have in our possession a letter from Dr Abbas bin Haji Alias (later Director of University Hospital) who testified to treating my father for several weeks until just before the outbreak of World War II.

Till his death in 1987, my father tried everything within his means to claim his pension and arrears by writing to both the Malaysian and British governments, but

in vain. In response to my father's letters in 1981-82, an official of the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur conveniently washed their hands off the matter: "I can only suggest that you try and seek recompense from the Malaysian authorities for wrongful dismissal from the School of Agriculture at Serdang. I am sorry we cannot help further."

From 1982 onwards, my father had been in touch with the Malaysian Pensions Division but the authorities kept asking why he did not report for duty after the end of World War II as his personal records showed 1.5.1941 as the last recorded entry, confirming his pensionable status. How could he have reported for duty when he was detained by the British Military Administration just weeks after the Japanese Surrender? He was then imprisoned until 1946 as an Awaiting Trial detainee. After his release he was unjustly dismissed. His pleas to the Chief Secretary to the British Government at the time also failed.

In 1983, the Malaysian Pensions Division suggested that he "seek legal redress by appealing in court to obtain a declaration that he was wrongfully dismissed and to determine appropriate awards. You may also engage a lawyer for the purpose." My father did not take up the case for lack of funds. I am full of regrets that I did not have the means to help him out then.

As a filial daughter, I did not leave the matter alone. In 1985, I sought the assistance of Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, who, with deep compassion and sincerity, forwarded the case to the relevant authorities. As a result, in January 1986, a year before my father's death, with approval from the Cabinet Committee, he received an ex-gratia consolation payment of RM14,000. He spent the money on an *umrah* (a minor *haj*), as he was too feeble to withstand the full *haj*. He passed away six months later.

My beloved father died regretting his futile efforts to gain his pensions and arrears, which he had hoped to leave to my mother, who although living mostly in deprivation, remained with him through thick and thin, believing fully in his struggle and cause. I have all the relevant documents on this matter.

Touring with Dr Burhanuddin (Late 1946): The Malay Nationalist Party

With bruised hearts, in a banana-laden lorry we left our dear hill-farm for my hometown, Matang. My eyes were fixed on the hill crest until it disappeared from our view as the lorry took a sharp turn beyond some unkempt rubber plantations. From my family home in Matang, we began to eke out a meagre living selling *laksa asam* noodle prepared by my wife who was stoic in the face of all challenges.

Although I had been freed conditionally just months earlier, I could not remain politically uninvolved. I knew only one thing; I could not sit back to watch the chain of political developments unfolding before my eyes. Forbidden from joining any political or trade organisation, I spent many hours at the Taiping MNP (Malay Nationalist Party) office. After all, the MNP had been founded by my friends, including Dr Burhanuddin, while I was a guest of 'His Majesty' in the Batu Gajah Prison.

Soon after Dr Burhanuddin's return from India and Burma, I re-entered Malaya's political arena, fully aware of the consequences. Although subject to conditions upon my release from detention, I had found solace in a Malay police officer's advice, "Enchik Mustapha, I appreciate your nationalist politics. You may continue, but be forewarned; do not be photographed with the 'others' and do not make speeches, in which case I cannot help you."

With a princely sum of \$200 saved from my noodle business and a less-than-princely suitcase, I bid my family goodbye. I had just recovered from malnutrition due to the appalling prison food. My heart gave a twinge when I heard an aunt ask gently, "Haven't you learnt your lesson?" To calm her down, I replied, "Well, if I sense trouble, I may come back." I then boarded a train to Kuala Lumpur before taking a bus to Melaka, the 'Land of Hang Tuah', the legendary Malay warrior.

The MNP's office in Melaka was in a tiny, rented shop-house. Dr Burhanuddin, Said bin Kemat, Ahmad bin Abdul Rahman (now in UMNO), Abdul Hamid bin Abdul (a Telegraph Office employee), Rashid

Maidin and Abdullah C.D. were there. (The last two are reportedly Malayan Communist Party members currently somewhere in the Malaysian jungle.) In Melaka, I visited historical spots such as Hang Tuah's Well, Hang Tuah's Footprint, Hang Jebat's grave,¹ the Melaka Fortress, St Xavier's tomb and locations where Malay fighters had fiercely defended Melaka against the Portuguese onslaught in 1511. I chanced upon a struggling Malay tailor keen to make Dr Burhanuddin a gift of a green khaki outfit for the struggle.

Later, I decided to join a closed-door meeting of MNP leaders, and greeted them with a shout of "*Merdeka*" (Independence), our nationalist salute. It was received with a resounding "*Merdeka*"! When I asked if 'an old freedom fighter' could join in, Ahmad Boestamam answered, "You are more than welcome." I sat on the floor, cross-legged like them and merely observed the proceedings. I did not reveal the release conditions imposed on me by the British Government; afraid that some sensitive politicians might send me out of the room as I was not even an MNP member.

After Dr Burhanuddin debriefed us on his visits to Burma and India, discussions moved to his forthcoming tour of several towns and villages stretching from Melaka Town to Balik Pulau on the island of Penang. It would be the first leg of MNP's nation-wide membership campaign. When seventy dollars was needed to rent a small stage in a Melaka park, I contributed the money from my wife's noodle business; my name was already included in the delegation list.

The meeting also decided to assign Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) to Kuala Lumpur to meet with leaders of the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA), a coalition of various political organisations (mostly non-Malay), to prepare the Perlembagaan Rakyat or The People's Constitutional Proposal for Malaya. Equipped with a few dollars, Ishak later 'worked and slept' in the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) Office in Kuala Lumpur until the PUTERA-AMCJA's draft of The People's Constitutional Proposal for Malaya was completed. PUTERA was short for Pusat Tenaga Rakyat, or the Centre for People's Power.

The next morning, Ahmad Boestamam disappeared from the Melaka MNP office. Three days later, photographs of Boestamam-led API (Generation of Aware Youths) members brandishing sharpened bamboo weapons were pinned on the office bulletin board. I told myself, "How convenient for the police! Do API members think their fight is a game? They're behaving as if they are participating in a stage show!" Just a day earlier, Dr Burhanuddin had respectfully introduced a retired Police Sergeant to me, saying, "He is our supporter." How gullible of Dr

Burhanuddin, I thought. Hadn't policemen pledged allegiance to the British Government for life? I resolved to step up security measures; no one could meet Dr Burhanuddin individually. I did not care if the others were upset with my new rules; they had no experience like I had. The war had taught me many things, chief among them being that we have to be cautious of 'enemies from within'.

The MNP mass rally in Melaka was mostly attended by plebians, with a sprinkling of government officers. MNP bullock carts and trishaws were painted with Hang Tuah's red and white colours, representing courage and truth. They also carried small red and white flags. Similar flags were seen fluttering from dilapidated buildings; no new buildings belonged to the Malays. We also rode in battered cars.

MNP President Dr Burhanuddin officially launched the rally as the red and white *Sang Saka Merah Putih* flag solemnly inched up, raised by API youths while the *Indonesia Raya* tune reverberated, as if Independence would be obtained by the Malays the next day. Everyone's spirits soared. To raise funds, MNP adopted my suggestion to auction garlands the way the Indian Independence League (IIL) members did for the Indian National Army (INA) during the Japanese Occupation. So, four garlands were obtained to decorate the necks of leading MNP figures. Dr Burhanuddin then announced MNP's planned upcountry visit and appealed to the Malays to donate generously towards the 'Malay struggle for Independence'.

The garlands were then auctioned off, not in the manner of capitalists and feudalists, but proletarian-style. When the first bidder called out \$1, his name was announced and he would climb on stage with the \$1. If the next person desired to donate some money, he would call out \$1.50, but instead of paying \$1.50, he needed to cough up only 50 cents, and so on. In this way, we collected \$30 to \$40 per garland from poor Malays with big hearts.

After each successful auction, the last bidder was invited up on stage to be garlanded by Dr Burhanuddin. The proud, newly garlanded man was then led backstage to be congratulated, after which the flowers were removed and replaced with a much cheaper arrangement. The lovely garland, one he had worn for just a couple of minutes, would be auctioned off again. In this manner, a party whose members came from the masses – farmers, fishermen, and labourers – accumulated a few dollars for political activities.

I was nominated auction manager several times, but remembering the Malay Special Branch Police Officer's words, I declined with the excuse of a sore throat.² So, the auctions were ably conducted by Rashid Maidin,

a former member of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). (After the Japanese surrender, Rashid Maidin was selected to go to London for the Victory Parade to march past His Majesty King George VI. Rashid was even awarded a medal.)

I would like to add that it was at that point³ that Dr Burhanuddin separated API from MNP. He explained that it was time to sever API's umbilical cord, as MNP had become too large. The youth body would function separately, but with the same noble objective of '*Merdeka*'. I whispered to Dr Burhanuddin that it was perhaps also time to set up the Ant Army, as in Indonesia, to move together with API.

Meeting Ibu Zain⁴

Most unexpectedly, Hajah Zainun, an active UMNO Women leader better known as Ibu Zain, paid us a visit. Also in the room were Dr Burhanuddin, Abdul Hamid bin Abdul and myself. Dr Burhanuddin introduced me as "a foremost freedom fighter and a former KMM Vice President just released from political detention." The kind lady congratulated me and added, "I like to get to know MNP leaders. They are all small in size but big in their political struggles."

After some discussions on Malay politics, Ibu Zain asked plainly, "If the MNP is fighting for Malaya's Independence, why are you singing *Indonesia Raya* and not an Independent Malaya song?" Dr Burhanuddin replied that both countries were aspiring towards the same objectives. He then added, "That is only a party song. There is nothing wrong with MNP singing *Indonesia Raya*. Furthermore, aren't we and Indonesia one and the same? The only difference between us were our colonial masters."

Ibu Zain left a lasting impression on me, with her gentle suggestion that MNP compose its own anthem, free of Indonesian influence. *Indonesia Raya* was sung by MNP members at all MNP and API ceremonies, including flag-raising, guard of honour inspections and openings of meeting. It was on such occasions that long haired and bushy-moustached API leader Ahmad Boestamam looked the pinnacle of invincibility as he sang the tune with great gusto.

After Ibu Zain left, we discussed her most observant comment. I shared her opinion that our fight should be separate from Indonesia's. Should Indonesia gain its Independence before Malaya, the Indonesians would be better able to promote our cause at the United Nations. If we were to gain our freedom first, we would do likewise for Indonesia. I drew Dr Burhanuddin's attention to the British sense of fair play. If we planned to become independent from the British, but wanted to latch

ourselves to Indonesia, that would be unacceptable to the British. I felt that we should go by the Atlantic Charter that encouraged colonised nations to strive for independence constitutionally but independently. After that, an *anschluss* could be formed, as between Germany and Austria.

I urged the MNP to compose Malaya's own national anthem. "It is very simple, just convert the 'KMM Song' composed by Kiman, Saidi Hashim and I when we demanded that Japan proclaim Malaya's Independence in January 1942. Add new lyrics, and presto, there you have our National Anthem!" I also explained that MNP's strength drew from the support of leftist non-Malay parties who were understandably apprehensive of MNP's attachment to Indonesia. They were wary of being hauled into an *Indonesia Raya* (Greater Indonesia) with the attainment of Independence. How could we convince them otherwise if MNP continued flying the Indonesian *Sang Saka Merah Putih* red and white flag while lustily singing *Indonesia Raya*.

My words fell on deaf ears; MNP activities continued to move along the lines decided by the MNP Supreme Council at its inauguration, which had taken place while I was languishing in the Batu Gajah Prison.

Tan Cheng Lock

At the invitation of Sir Cheng Lock Tan, we visited him at his Hereen Street residence, a shop-house with square red floor tiles, furnished with antique carved Chinese furniture inlaid with mother of pearl. Dr Burhanuddin and I were received with honour and after some shoptalk, we moved on to Malayan politics, to matters that touched the lives of all Malayan communities. We needed this heart-to-heart talk to clear the air before meeting at the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference in Kuala Lumpur later on.

Sir Cheng Lock Tan insisted that the people of Malaya be described as 'Malayan', but we gently rejected it by proposing the matter be discussed at the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference. We then discussed the gaping economic disparities among the different communities. I took the opportunity to quote Stalin, something to the effect of "a nation can be founded by different communities with different religions, languages and customs, but their economic status should be equitable or there will be no solidarity." Please excuse any inaccuracy, as I had read his book 35 years ago before today.

Sir Cheng Lock Tan commended me for my extensive reading. He then made an incredible offer: if we were to accept a 'Malayan' people concept and 'nationality' based on indirect reference to *jus soli*, he was

prepared to accumulate and present the Malays with \$500,000 for economic development. We declined the offer, saying, "It is up to the people. We are only their voice." I would like to know if that amount was ever paid out, and if so, to whom?⁵

MNP Tour of North Malaya

When the date arrived, we set out from Melaka Town, stopping at several towns until we reached Tanjung Malim, the town which straddles the Perak and Selangor borders and where MNP received an astounding welcome from rural Malays. (On the other hand, UMNO was supported by town Malays.)

Before reaching Tanjung Malim, I had quickly nipped to the MNP Secretariat in Kampung Baru, to collect reports that came in from different parts of Malaya. Some letters came from overseas, mostly from the Middle East, where Malay students expressed enthusiastic support for the MNP. However, our contact with the Middle East was limited to individuals and organisations.

Although the MNP Secretariat was at Kampung Baru, the heart of Kuala Lumpur's Malay settlement, we did not hold any rallies there. It would be pointless as most of the populace were UMNO supporters. They were the ones who readily decorated their homes with oil-lamps to protest against the Federal Constitution. MNP members considered such demonstrations a waste of time and resources; more demand for kerosene would only fatten the colonial master's wallet.

In Tanjung Malim, we stopped at the home of Chikgu Bahauddin and his brother, which was situated in town. There, we held a meeting and gave talks at night, ably arranged by Rashid Maidin.⁶ Those who loved politics, including Enchik Ghaffar Baba,⁷ sneaked out of the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) to listen to MNP talks.

I marvelled at how an Islamic nationalist like Dr Burhanuddin worked hand in hand with the communist Rashid Maidin. Out of curiosity, I asked Dr Burhanuddin, "Whose delegation is this, MNP's or MCP's?" Dr Burhanuddin answered, "Both!" I pressed on, "How can nationalism compromise with communism?" Dr Burhanuddin responded coolly, "We are a democratic party. We will wait and see. Let the people decide."

We stopped in Sungkai, Bidor, Tapah and Gopeng, all tiny towns in Perak, but homes to a band of staunch nationalists. In Gopeng, former KMM member Chikgu Yaakub was disgusted to see me handing a towel to Dr Burhanuddin after his bath. "Why are you behaving like a slave? You were KMM's respected leader. And just who is this Doctor?" I took

a long time to explain to him that we should not be like the Vietnamese, who took forever to produce a new leader if one were to die or be detained. KMM no longer existed and I was 'dirty' in the eyes of the British. Therefore, let a new leader steer our nationalist struggle for Independence with the 'dirty one' guiding him on." Chikgu Yaakub left feeling less upset.

We stopped in Ipoh, the capital of tin-rich Perak, to discuss the fate of the Rakyat Trading Company or People's Trading Company, a printing company owned exclusively by poor leftist politicians. Here, Pak Chik Ahmad reprimanded me for interfering with company matters. He forgot I had every right. It was the politicians – Ahmad Boestamam, Abdul Rahman Rahim and I, who had slept on grass mats with our arms as pillows to set up the company. Truly, Pak Chik Ahmad feared I would wrest control of the company.

As it turned out, eleven years later in 1957, Pak Chik Ahmad and four concerned shareholders (Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir, Chikgu Yusuf bin Abdul Rahman, Chikgu Basir bin Udoh and Chikgu Ariffin bin Ibrahim) begged me to take over the management of the heavily indebted company from Pak Chik Ahmad. I sacrificed much time, money and energy to salvage the Rakyat Trading Company, at the expense of my own family.

We arrived at the royal town of Kuala Kangsar in Perak where active MNP members included Chikgu Sharif bin Salleh, Sharif bin Badul, Rashid Ali, Rashid Karim, Rashid Mat Yit,⁸ Ustaz Karim (later an UMNO Councillor), Haji Hamzah, Haji Ahmad Fadzil, Baheran bin Alang Ahmad and Mohamad Judin.⁹

I vividly remember an incident, which reflected a very brave young man's uncompromised anti-colonial sentiments. That night, in his speech on the bank of the Perak River, Rashid Maidin vehemently condemned the British Government. As he asked the audience, "Who are these colonialists?" four British Military Police members wearing red caps appeared on the scene. In just as loud a voice, Rashid pointed to the four, "Those are the colonialists I just mentioned!" I told myself, "This is a very plucky young man!" A less courageous one would have faltered or shut his mouth.

Rashid lashed at the imperialistic and capitalistic British whom he claimed had sent him to England to 'cool' his political fire. He asserted that "The desire to fight for our nation's Independence is our birthright; it should burn with fury within every man's heart." He then asked the audience, "Do you know what I saw in London?" Rashid paused for no answer; "At the Malaya House, I saw two paintings on exhibit. One showed the Malays as an uncivilised group of people; mere farmers of

rubber, resin and rattan. The other one depicted a beach scene, where Malay fishermen were being received by their family members with their sarongs so high up it almost revealed their private parts. The Malay fishermen were seen eating bananas!" After a short pause, he added, "If I had a grenade in my hand then, I would have thrown it at the paintings. How dare the imperialists portray us Malays in that manner. It brings us great shame!" The audience's applause rang like thunder.

Many religious leaders, including those in Government Service, attended our rally at the Kuala Kangsar Malay Club. These religious figures were extremely taken by Dr Burhanuddin's gentle urges when he said, "We can defeat a stronger person not only with strength but by repeated actions." He produced a convincing metaphor, "Given time, even humble drops of water can leave a hollow in a rock! The same applies to our struggle. Do not be disheartened by the fact that we are weak compared to the mighty colonialists. If we continue to oppose relentlessly, we will emerge victorious at the end of the day." The audience listened in rapture.

Dr Burhanuddin and I crossed the Perak River to Parit Town by ferry. It was most inclement weather; deafening thunder and jagged lightning beat down upon us as the river water swirled crazily. I whispered to Dr Burhanuddin, "I have a strong feeling that we may soon be arrested and detained by the colonialists." The doctor replied calmly, "That may not be bad, actually! We can at least rest. We are far too tired."

In the coastal town of Lumut, I noticed that many government servants were active in leftist political party activities. Among them were the late Mohammad Isa (a hospital assistant), Nordin Tak (now a retiree in Ipoh) and the late Chikgu Junid Mahmud, known for his original, and sometimes outlandish ideas.

In Lumut, we fed on truly spiritual fare by Baharuddin Tahir.¹⁰ It was there that I saw the power of a gifted speaker. He mesmerised the audience. This happened when Baharuddin saw some members busy eating peanuts. He called out, "I eat too, just like you. So, let me stop here and join you in eating." The audience apologised in chorus, "Sorry, we are so sorry. Please carry on. We will obey you."

(When the MNP was later banned, Baharuddin moved to Indonesia to carry on with our fight. He returned in 1958. I went to see him briefly for the latest news on Malay politicians residing in Indonesia, such as Ibrahim Yaakub, Hassan Haji Manan, Abdul Karim Rashid, Bahar bin Abik, Sulung bin Chik and others.)

As the tour continued, we visited Taiping, Batu Kurau, Air Terjun (near Trong), Padang Gajah, Padang Rengas, Sungai Tinggi, Gunung

Semanggul, Selama, Parit Buntar, Bukit Mertajam and finally made our way to our last stop – Balik Pulau on Penang Island.

API youths were ever ready to fight to the last, in uniforms proudly sewn with API emblems on the sleeves. It was in Sungai Tinggi, Perak that I heard Ahmad Boestamam gave a most fiery speech to his youths. Had he ordered, “Set this house ablaze”, the youths would have done so without question. Such was Boestamam’s oratorical power. No politician can beat Boestamam in delivering speeches that set hearts afire. Ahmad Boestamam was indeed a freedom fighter of the highest calibre, especially with respect to his superb organisational skills.

In laid-back Selama, we were securely guarded by API youths who ran breathlessly alongside our cars to ensure that we were out of the reach of the colonialists and their henchmen. The fire of freedom raged in every API youth’s bosom. Members bought their own uniforms, took leave from work, stood in the scorching sun and were now running alongside our cars to protect us. We could not offer them any reward but for the elusive goal of Independence, which was a long shot. Can anyone today show me the same fire in the hearts of politicians? I don’t think I will ever witness another scene comparable to the one I am trying to share with you now. Formidable solidarity, soaring spirits and unquestioning sacrifice in the name of country and people; all these came out of our common desire to release the motherland from colonial fetters.

That is perhaps why some leader had once proposed: “The most opportune time to claim Independence is during a war or just after a war has ended.” This show of courage in Selama was in 1946, a year after the end of World War II – a most opportune moment indeed.

In Selama, Haji Tahir bin Haji Rauf, MNP’s chief for Selama was seen proudly wearing a white Malay suit with a red *samping* (traditional cloth wrapped around the waist, worn by males). This PWD employee had sacrificed much time, money and energy for the MNP.

We were taken to the Selama Mosque¹¹ where Dr Burhanuddin delivered a speech that brought emotions to a boil. Among the audience were relatively more *hajis* than was usual at our rallies. It was here that Dr Burhanuddin’s speech was most effective. While talking about an Imam in an Egyptian mosque, Dr Burhanuddin asserted, “The fact is, the Qur’an is politics!” Usually, I was the one who handed Dr Burhanuddin small bits of paper containing points to be emphasised, but at this mosque, it was unnecessary. Dr Burhanuddin was in his element.

I consider myself privileged to have listened to speeches made by many outstanding politicians such as Dr Burhanuddin, Ahmad Boestamam, Rashid Maidin, Baharuddin Tahir, Abdullah C.D. and others. I did

not give any speeches because of the Malay Special Branch Police Officer's reminder. When asked to speak, I claimed to have a sore throat; when asked to be included in a photograph, I pretended to need the toilet.

When we set foot on Penang Island, a host of weathered jalopies decorated with red and white flags were already waiting. These battered cars belonged to Penang Malays, under the leadership of MNP Penang chief Haji Harun bin Haji Putih. What a sad scene – these ancient cars looked like blemishes against Penang's lovely buildings and mansions, all belonging to non-Malays. The old cars looked terribly out of place, like squatters in a fabulous town. We moved towards Balik Pulau in the old cars – honoured to have ferried valiant freedom fighters before becoming junkyard scrap.

What we saw on both sides of the road made Rashid Maidin and I, both talkative men, completely silent. Our mouths, usually eager to discuss the plight of the Malays, were shut tight. What I saw wrung my heart. So it must have been for Rashid. Malay homes were dilapidated huts with leaky roofs and gaping holes in the walls. But the pertinent question that struck us was, "How much rice did each house have, if any!" We both shed silent tears. We stayed in Balik Pulau for two days.

Haji Harun bin Haji Putih¹²

This tall and good-looking Balik Pulau MNP leader told us that many of the people living in his area were from Aceh in north Sumatra, and found the MNP struggle appealing because of the red and white flag. I met Haji Harun again in 1955 and 1975. In 1975, when Chikgu Yusuf bin Ayub and I visited him, he told us that after MNP was banned in 1948, he joined the Malayan People's Party. During and after the Malaysia-Indonesia Confrontation he stayed in Indonesia for six years. He claimed to have declared a Malayan Republic through the Indonesian Republic's Radio and the Indonesian press. He also said that President Soekarno had supplied him with four food items every month.

Haji Harun claimed to have met Ibrahim Yaakub who chose to ignore him. After the fall of Soekarno, Haji Harun was told to stop his activities. Ibrahim then took him to a police station where he was detained to be sent home to Malaysia. Out of shame to be sent home by Indonesian authorities, he returned to Johore in a sampan via Pulau Bintan, but was arrested and detained. On my last visit to Haji Harun, my wife and I left some money and food for this nationalist who had fought with all his heart. He died in 1977.

Reception of MNP

Our delegation received a warm response wherever we went except in urban areas. I can say that Malaya's Independence in 1957 was not totally due to UMNO and its leader Tunku Abdul Rahman. The spirit of *Merdeka* was already brewing in the hearts of the Malays, after provocation by Dr Burhanuddin, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Ahmad Boestamam, and many MNP and KMM freedom fighters. They were the ones who taught the politically uninformed Malays the meaning of Independence and imparted a craving for it.

Returning to Kuala Lumpur

With one bag each, clambering up and down trains, buses, old cars and trishaws, Dr Burhanuddin and I arrived in Kuala Lumpur. No one was at the station to receive us. We lugged our bags and entered a Malabari-run coffee-shop for breakfast. But we could sense two Special Branch Police staff following us. After breakfast, we walked towards a Hindu temple in High Street to meet Mr Thivy of the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) who had an office near there. The MIC and many non-Malay political parties then were leftists.

I know the code name given to me by the Special Branch. Dr Burhanuddin was 'Sparrow', a tiny bird that could take over huge buildings by setting up giant colonies. Also, in 1946, the Field Security Service Officers who interrogated me after my release from the Batu Gajah Prison had referred to Dr Burhanuddin as 'The Mahatma Gandhi of Malaya'.

Notes

1. Hang Tuah's great friend who demonstrated total loyalty to a friend. Leftist Malays are more inclined towards Hang Jebat than Hang Tuah.
2. I was by Dr Burhanuddin's side to tend to his food, his medication (Seven Seas Cod Liver Oil), and his schedule. As a person who was constantly ill, I valued a leader's health. I was also his private secretary and adviser. MNP leaders accepted my voluntarily shouldering these responsibilities.
3. MNP's Second Congress in December 1946.
4. One of the first few women Parliamentarians, representing Pontian Selatan, Johore.
5. The same amount of money was presented by MCA to UMNO for Malay economic progress in 1953.
6. Rashid Maidin, Musa Ahmad and Abdullah C.D. were not MNP members as they had already joined the MCP. They told me this.
7. *Editor's note*: Later Tun and Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia (1986-93).
8. When the British Government failed to arrest the much-wanted Rashid Maidin during the Malayan Emergency in 1948, they instead arrested and detained all these

- three Rashids. Rashid Ali was a barber, Rashid Karim a tailor and Rashid Mat Yit, a farmer.
9. Baهران bin Alang Ahmad and Mohamad Judin are already dead. They held three-year Diploma Course Certificates from the School of Agriculture in Serdang.
 10. A graduate of Maahad Il-Ehya As-Syariff religious institute in Gunung Semanggul, he was an exceptional orator.
 11. It was only in Selama that our opposition party was allowed to speak in a mosque.
 12. I have a statement written by Chikgu Yusuf bin Ayub from Taiping, dated 23 October 1975, recounting our meeting with Haji Harun. The latter also told us he was assigned anti-Malaysia tasks along the borders near Singapore.

PUTERA-AMCJA Conference (1947)

By the grace of God, through the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference, I was given a second opportunity to participate in efforts towards drafting Malaya's Independence Constitution. The first time had been in July 1945, through the Japanese-sponsored Hodoshō and KRIS, at a time when Japan was like a dragon in its death throes, struggling against the Allied onslaught. There were two differences. My first effort had been with Dr Burhanuddin, who had served the Japanese Sumatra-Malaya Military Administration in Taiping while I was a farmer. Then, there had been only five Malay States; this time, there were nine.

On 22 December 1946, multi-ethnic, but mainly non-Malay leftist political bodies in Malaya formed a coalition called the All-Malayan Council of Joint Action (AMCJA). Its members comprised:

1. Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) – led by John Thivy,
2. Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) – led by John Eber,
3. New Democratic Youth League (NDYL),
4. Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Ex-Comrades Association (MPAJECA),
5. Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU).¹

Four months later, on 22 February 1947, left-wing Malay parties formed their own coalition during a meeting at the MNP Head Office in Kuala Lumpur. It was called Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA) or the Centre for People's Power. Led by Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako), the member parties were:

1. Malay Nationalist Party, MNP as its nucleus – led by Dr Burhanuddin
2. Angkatan Pemuda Insaf, API (Generation of Aware Youth) – led by Ahmad Boestamam
3. Angkatan Wanita Sedar, AWAS (Generation of Conscious Women) – led by Shamsiah Fakeh
4. Gerakan Angkatan Muda, GERAM (Young Generation Movement) – led by Aziz Ishak and A. Samad Ismail

5. Barisan Tani Se Malaya, BATAS (Pan-Malayan Farmers/Peasants Front) – led by Musa Ahmad,
6. Majlis Agama Tertinggi SeMalaya, MATA (Pan-Malayan Supreme Religious Council).

While travelling all over North Malaya with Dr Burhanuddin, we had discussed, at great length, the forthcoming PUTERA-AMCJA Conference, consisting of left-wing Malay and non-Malay political parties, to promote our demand for Independence from the British through constitutional means. Most post-war non-Malay unions and political parties were left-leaning. MNP was the only Malay political party which, even as early as 1946, had realised that Independence could not be achieved unless the demand was unanimously made by the three major communities in Malaya – the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians.

UMNO, led by Datuk Onn bin Jaafar, had yet to fathom this reality, and continued to function as if it was still in pre-war Malaya. In 1951, six years after the war ended, an UMNO-led delegation went to London to demand more Malayan Civil Service officers, more Malay police officers, especially above the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), and improvements in Malay education and other issues. Yet not one mention of *Merdeka* (Independence) was made. Ironically, it was also in 1951 that Datuk Onn began to realise that the co-operation of non-Malays was vital for obtaining Independence.

As mentioned earlier, Ishak Haji Muhammad had been earlier sent by Dr Burhanuddin to Kuala Lumpur to meet AMCJA representative Gerald de Cruz to initiate arrangements for PUTERA and AMCJA to work hand in hand in our struggle against the British. The resulting draft, The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya, was the document Ishak Haji Muhammad had handed to Dr Burhanuddin and me at the end of our two-day Balik Pulau visit. Ishak said, "This is all I managed to achieve. If something is unsatisfactory, please bring it up at the forthcoming PUTERA-AMCJA meeting." We promised to go over the draft on our way back to Kuala Lumpur. Ishak left before we could even invite him to a meal. Dr Burhanuddin commented, "Ishak is like that. He is a man of few words." I suspected a slight tension between Dr Burhanuddin and Ishak then; they could hardly bring themselves to talk to each other. I was willing to play the role of the mediator. However, there were four things that kept the two connected: the struggle, the party, the Malay race and the nation. Nothing could keep the two men apart with these four elements present.

The clauses proposed by AMCJA and MDU were for:

1. Malaya and Singapore to be united.²

2. A popularly elected Federal Consultative Council.
3. Equal citizenship rights to be accorded to all those who considered Malaya their permanent home and the object of their undivided loyalty.
4. The Malay sultans to become constitutional monarchs. The British would no longer have the right to interfere or advise the Malay sultans. The popularly elected Federal Consultative Council would be exclusively responsible for all such advice.
5. Islam and Malay customs would be fully controlled by the Malay people through a special council, not by the sultans.
6. Special privileges for the advancement of Malays in all fields.

Having read the draft, I was certain that if the leftist Malay parties accepted the draft in *toto* , the parties would lose credibility, influence and support. However, in the draft's preamble I saw a loophole in the words 'the Nine Malay States'. I drew Dr Burhanuddin's attention to the word 'Malay'. If we 'used' this loophole wisely, the Malays would gain substantially. During the tiresome mail train ride from Penang to Kuala Lumpur, Dr Burhanuddin was happy with one boiled egg, a banana and a cup of coffee. I had to supplement that with a plate of fried rice from the buffet coach. Food was important to me.

As I had mentioned, as soon as we arrived in Kuala Lumpur from North Malaya, we looked for lawyer John Thivy at his High Street office. He was MIC's Secretary-General, while Budd Singh was President; both were socialists. Thivy, being from a notable Kuala Kangsar family, fully understood Malay customs and aspirations. He confided in us that the Indian community shared a common fear with the Malays – that of being drowned by the Chinese. He therefore promised to support all proposals beneficial to the 'safety' of the Malays and Indians. I believe Thivy left MIC when it leaned to the right; I am told he is now in Fiji.

PUTERA-AMCJA Conference

Before attending the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference, we Malays met in the rented Kampung Baru home of Ibrahim Karim, API's Secretary-General. We drank black coffee out of a pail for lack of proper utensils. It was bought with the paltry balance of money collected from our garland-auctions and the sale of photographs of Dr Burhanuddin and Ibrahim Yaakub. Disappointingly, the photos were not selling. No one bought the one of Ibrahim, although he was then deemed a Malay hero.

We took a bus to a five-storey building in Foch Avenue, the highest building in Kuala Lumpur at the time, where the MCP flag fluttered in

the wind. However, the conference was not held on the floor housing the MCP's headquarters. Desks were arranged in a circle. Dr Burhanuddin sat rigidly, with me on his left, and Taha Kalu³ on his right. John Eber (MDU) was on Taha's right and farther on, beside John Eber, were Ahmad Boestamam (API), Lim Kean Chye (MDU) and John Thivy (MIC). Ishak sat opposite me with Conference Secretary Gerald de Cruz (MDU) on his left while Sir Cheng Lock Tan (AMCJA) dressed in a shirt and coat ensemble sans tie, sat on Ishak's right. On Sir Cheng Lock Tan's right were representatives from the New Democratic Youth League (NDYL), Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Ex-Comrades Association (MPAJECA) and Cheng Loo from the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Union (PMFTU) – all very young men. They were probably the front men or dummies. Everyone held a draft of The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya. Mine was full of markings, reflecting my pre-occupation during the train journey.

The PUTERA-AMCJA Conference began with a speech by Ishak as Chairman. We had to tread carefully; no undesirable elements should come into play lest an ugly impasse rear its head. Nothing untoward must happen to jeopardise our efforts to gain the nation's Independence. We had to be of one heart; bickering would only contribute to prolonged British rule. Even the normally vocal and aggressive Ahmad Boestamam was extraordinarily impassive. Everyone adopted a passive attitude, a patient demeanour, a peaceful mind and a united stance. Everyone wanted an end to British rule. Everyone craved to live in a free Malaya. Chairman Ishak was extremely careful in choosing his words and ministering his responsibilities. The only one who spoke more shrilly than the rest was Conference Secretary Gerald de Cruz, who was known for his humour and jest. All the six items were endorsed with ease. I noticed that the representatives from the NDYL, MPAJECA and PMFTU hardly uttered a word, just like Sir Cheng Lock Tan.

On behalf of PUTERA, I proposed four more clauses to strengthen our rights, referring to the magic phrase 'the Nine Malay States' already in the preamble as proof of PUTERA's absolute right to claim them:

- a. Malay to be Malaya's national and official language,
- b. Malaya's defence and foreign policies be handled by the Malayan and British Governments with equal responsibility,
- c. *Melayu* (Malay) as the nationality of the people of Malaya,
- d. The National Flag would have a red band above a white one.

Clauses (a) and (b) were quickly endorsed with the support of NDYL, MPAJECA and PMFTU representatives who abhorred colonialism. But

clause (c) raised the conference room's temperature. The same degree of unrest was experienced each time the Malays demanded a 60-40 quota in the running of the administration and in employment. Sir Cheng Lock Tan vehemently opposed demand (c) while the three young men looked calm enough. I stood up to voice my disappointment at the opposition, drawing their attention to one question. How would hundreds of thousands of Malays – supporters of MNP, API and AWAS in the *kampungs* – react, should PUTERA announce that 'Malayan' and not 'Melayu' would be the term used to describe the people's nationality? They would probably charge at us like bulls provoked by a red cape. Leftist Malay parties would be ruined, much to the glee of the British and right-wing Malay parties.

Even though I⁴ had presented my case with great care, Lim stood up and remarked, "We are not dogs to be led by the people. We lead the people." In response to such strong words, I retorted in a flash, "Are you not here at this conference table because the people chose you? Do not humiliate the people. You ought to retract your words."

I then saw Conference Secretary de Cruz write something on a large piece of paper and hold it up for all to see. On the paper was written "CRACK" in big, bold letters. Chairman Ishak wisely proposed the matter be handled by a sub-committee later that evening and its decision be announced the next day. The sub-committee met that night in Kampung Baru over a Malay dinner of rice and tapioca shoot vegetable curry, during which time a PUTERA representative managed to positively influence members who had opposed the proposal to describe our nationality as 'Malay'.

We had asked, "What is wrong with using the term 'Malay' to describe our nationality? If this request is denied, we can only deduce that colonial elements have infiltrated this conference, and that colonialists are still in control." Gerald de Cruz loved Malay food. Perhaps the tapioca shoot vegetable curry contributed to the agreement that 'Malay' will be the agreed nationality of the people. I was glad that the matter had not split up the conference. Actually, the Malay nationality proposal was won due to the votes of the three Chinese youths. They were the first ones to be convinced by our little speech and appeals. On the second day of the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference, API leader Ahmad Boestamam, who was honoured with the final vote, gave PUTERA the winning edge. With that victory, I felt that the Malay states and the Malay race would be forever preserved. In Hang Tuah's words, "The Malays will not perish from this earth."

Next in the discussion was the question of citizenship. AMCJA had proposed the *jus soli* concept, but PUTERA found it difficult to accept.

However, Taha Kalu seemed to agree with *jus soli*. As he sat near me, I raised my fist as if to warn him, "Should you support this *jus soli* concept, I will punch you." To my relief, he voted in support of PUTERA. Despite some frantic hand signalling, Ahmad Boestamam – who sat at a distance from me – did not understand my signals. He chose AMCJA's stand.⁵ I said to myself, "Allah! What will happen now?" The AMCJA won and we were in deep trouble.

My mind quickly came up with an idea to overcome the matter. Pretending not to know the meaning of 'amendments', I asked the chairman to define the term. Then, I asked what 'clause' meant. I pretended not to know these words so as to allay the fear of the others. I then proposed a 'clause' be included to determine the quota for Malays and non-Malays in all Federal Councils and in all government business. I wanted a restriction or a certain formula in the Malay and non-Malay sharing.

Conference secretary Gerald de Cruz commented on my proposal as sweetly as he could. He said he had anticipated it. He explained that if the 'universal franchise' policy was adopted, the Malays should get 95 per cent of the vote and 95 per cent of all seats and posts. The other conference members were taken in. Chairman Ishak could not do much as his hands were tied. Dr Burhanuddin's mouth was shut tight, as the conference was conducted in English. (Earlier, when the 'national language' issue was being discussed, non-Malay members had asked for a compromise, "Please give us ten years to master the Malay Language." In view of this, how could we compel them to use Malay at the conference?) I stood up, stating with great care that, "We Malays do not want 95 per cent as that is unjust. We do not want 80 per cent as that would be unfair. Neither do we want 80 per cent or 70 per cent. But in the name of all Malays who own this land, we want 60 per cent. We ask for only 60 per cent because we are holding fast to the concept of democracy. At the same time, we want to preserve the rights of the people of this land."

I was shouted at by the MDU leader, the lawyer John Eber.⁶ He snarled, "I did not want to say anything harsh earlier, but now, I have to. The truth is, your people do not have the right to claim Independence – what more to obtain other people's help to appeal on your behalf." He added, "We are the ones who are willing to work with you and help you claim it. Now you want to determine the quota for yourselves and for us?" He paused and continued, "I am standing here to promote my party principles and one of them is democracy." Before sitting down, he pointed his finger at me and asked clearly, "Is he democratic?"

I was forced to stand up another time to respond to his words. I forgot how to remain calm and collected. I had forgotten about compromise and co-operation. Luckily, I remembered Sutan Jenain's words, "Be hot in the heart, but not in the head." With whatever was left of my composure, I said, "Look at the appearance of PUTERA members, the Malays, at this conference. Their hair uncombed, clothes unkempt and not ironed. Some did not have a chance to wash as they slept in bus stations and train stations in order to attend this conference. Some did not even have breakfast. They drank coffee out of a pail. But you, sir (looking at John Eber), even though you were given a comfortable rattan chair, you still need a folded towel to serve as a cushion. Who among us truly needs Independence, you or us?" John Eber got up to pull the folded towel off his chair. His face was red with anger. He was enraged, but I could not care less. An insult for an insult!

The Chairman stood up to calm the situation and again suggested the quota issue be discussed by a sub-committee. The outcome was positive. AMCJA agreed to the 60-40 quota. I was thankful to God for His blessings. The Malay States and the Malay people were now secure and safe. This would maintain Malay pre-eminence. The outcome would guarantee the future of the Malays, especially in a situation where non-Malay votes may outnumber Malay votes. I must add that MIC John Thivy in the AMCJA kept his word by giving us his vote every time, to our mutual benefit.

Outcome

The ten principles we discussed came to be known as the Ten People's Principles, to represent all communities. Since The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya was endorsed and announced to the nation, the PUTERA-AMCJA partnership was reinforced because the masses, not the administrators and the elite, were strongly behind us. The final copy of The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya was sent to the British Government as the voice of the different communities living in Malaya who clamoured for Independence. The people's response to the constitution was proof of their spirit. But the British appeared unconcerned, refusing to hold discussions with us, or even to read the constitution, as if nothing urgent was happening. We had to think of our next constitutional move. As a result, the *hartal*⁷ of October 1947 was organised and received widespread support from the people. Shops and business houses shut their doors. Kuala Lumpur looked deserted.

What the Dailies Wrote

I don't remember what the Malay papers wrote. *Majlis* was certainly in opposition to the *hartal* as it was wary of any co-operative efforts by the three races. But the 23 September 1947 edition of *The Straits Times* described the *hartal* as: "The first attempt to put Malayan party politics on a plane higher than that of rival racial interests and also the first attempt to build a political bridge between the domiciled non-Malay communities and the Malay race". The other English language newspaper editorials also found The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya generally fair.

Conclusion

The PUTERA-AMCJA effort was my third attempt to gain Independence. I had failed in all three but I continued to work towards loosening the colonial grip on Malaya and freeing Malaya from British fetters. With that uppermost in my mind, I decided to continue fighting for the cause with Dr Burhanuddin. As that required my staying on in Kuala Lumpur, I felt that it was time I brought my family (whom I had left for months in Matang) to join me in Kuala Lumpur.

Notes

1. Abdullah C.D. was active in PMFTU, whose members had increased to hundreds of thousands in both Peninsula Malaya and Singapore. This shocked the British, who introduced new rules and regulations requiring PMFTU to be broken into separate unions with leaders from the workers themselves.
2. No man can live if his head is separated from his body.
3. Active in MNP until it was banned. Now an active member of PAS and part of the ruling National Front (1973-78).
4. I was included in the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference as special adviser to Dr Burhanuddin.
5. See his book, *Dr Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*.
6. Migrated to a colonial and impartial nation. Had he remained in British Malaya, he would have been detained.
7. The idea may have been MIC's as the *hartal* was a popular weapon among Indian freedom fighters.

Kuala Lumpur (1947-52): Continuing the Political Struggle

I moved to Kuala Lumpur in 1947 to continue my *perjuangan* (political struggle) for Independence. Due to conditions imposed on me by the British Government, I decided to surreptitiously carry on as private secretary and adviser to Dr Burhanuddin. During MNP's tour of North Malaya, I had felt the palpable lack of educated Malays in the party. Dr Burhanuddin was a solo locomotive engine pulling too many coaches; a second engine would certainly help.

While attending the PUTERA-AMCJA Conference in Kuala Lumpur, I had left some money with Ibrahim Karim (Secretary-General of API, later banned by the British) as a down payment on the house he was about to vacate. The sum also included some money to assist his return to Batu Gajah. This answers Ahmad Boestamam's question, "Where did Ibrahim Karim get the money to return home to his village?" which had previously appeared in a press article. Ibrahim had in fact sold the party's typewriter but it was still insufficient for his family's return fare.

I left Matang¹ for Kuala Lumpur with \$250, several battered suitcases containing worn-out clothes, a wife, three daughters and a son. Not a single item we wore or carried was new. While many Government Servants were celebrating their back pay, I had been languishing in a British prison, and later dismissed from my job. While travelling in a third class coach, I felt hopelessly sorry for my four children who were forced to move, their schooling once again interrupted. They were indeed the innocent victims of my political struggles. But I buried my feelings, in the hope that their future would be less bleak in a 'free' Malaya.

An ugly incident occurred upon our arrival at the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station. While negotiating the cost of ferrying my family to Kampung Baru with a Malay trishaw-puller, a burly Sikh taxi driver intervened. I told myself, "A taxi ride would be faster and safer; Kampung Baru was quite a distance. Further, we would need three trishaws and my children were tired and restless." While I was thinking, the two men

started brawling, leading to a chase, followed by a serious fistfight on the ground. I still remember the horrendous effect the taxi driver's shoes (with soles made of used car tyre rubber) left on the face of the poor Malay man. It was much worse than a punch. I was very sorry for the trishaw-puller, but as my children were exhausted, I called for another taxi. I feel guilty to this day. My small heart tells me, "You are cruel. You allowed a much bigger man to hit a small one. You were the cause of it." I hope God Almighty will forgive me.

The house Ibrahim Karim should have booked for us was already occupied. Ibrahim had not given the landlady my down payment. By lugging our belongings and asking around in the dark, we found a vacant unit near a mosque. We took it without question; we were all tired and sleepy. That was the first time I had rented a space. Although expensive, the unit had no rooms; just an open space divided in half by a limp cloth that hung from some crude wires. The landlady – who, like us, was down on her luck – stayed in the same house.

My legs were still troubling me. Two days after we arrived, we were visited by none other than Sutan Jenain! To further my political struggles he had sought former KMM member Idris Hakim to inform him of my move to Kuala Lumpur. Idris agreed to help by supplying us with rice, flour and sugar² rations from the shop he ran, the Selangor General Agency (SGA), KMM's sole economic concern.³ As the rice supply was small, we supplemented our meals with wheat flour noodles in a type of fish gravy. The landlady and her three children joined in our meals as she was in equally dire straits. When young girls carrying rattan baskets selling Malay delicacies passed our house, we scraped some coins from the bottom of my wife's sewing basket to buy them. To our despair, when the coins ran out, my young daughters ended up selling Malay cakes like the girls.

Sutan Jenain called for a meeting of leftist politicians such as Abu, Kundur, Abdul Aziz (now the husband of Tan Sri Hajah Aishah Ghani, former Minister of Social Welfare), Badrillah and others living in Kampung Baru to discuss my situation. They decided to purchase two trishaws and daily collections would be donated to me. I declined the sincere offer. Prophet Mohammed *s.a.w.* chastised any able-bodied Muslim who begged or expected donations when he could earn a living.

A friend who had been hospitalised with me in the Malay Hospital just before the war broke out recommended a clerical job at the War Damage Claims Department. On the day I was to report for work, I hesitated at the office doorway, turned around and left. I could not bring myself to serve the colonialists any more. Desperate, I applied for a

driver's job, but the prospective employer, a Chinese businessman, rejected me as soon as he found out that I was an educated Malay. His wife, who took pity on me, offered me a bookkeeping job, but I had no experience in that area.

Whenever I felt healthy enough, I went to see Dr Burhanuddin at the house he stayed in whenever he was in Kuala Lumpur. This house was also MNP's Office. There, we read and responded to all MNP correspondence. That was all the sacrifice I could offer; I was poor and struggling to make a small livelihood. I was often visited by 'very good' people like Sutan Jenain, Rashid Maidin, Musa Ahmad, Abdullah C.D., Bahrum Abdul Basar, Hamzah (not Hamzah Alang) and others. It was not surprising then that two to four CID police officers were always watching my house.

As a consequence, the landlady sent us packing. "Enchik Mustapha, please look for another house. I am sorry for you and your wife... but what can I do?" She was genuinely sorry; we often gave her rice when she had none. But a religious Kampung Baru elder had poisoned her mind against me; he had accused me of being a communist and I therefore deserved banishment from the village. So one pitch-dark night we left the house – even though an old wives' tale cautioned against moving out at night for fear of bad luck.

We next rented a room only slightly bigger than a prison cell at \$12 per month. It was one of several in the house. As it was about the size of a rabbit hole, my four children slept under the platform that acted as my bed. The landlady, who ran a canteen, invited us, like her other tenants, to make delicacies for sale at her canteen at a 20 per cent commission. So, we started making Malay cakes and savouries not already attempted by the other tenants. It generated a miniscule daily cash flow. The cloth vendor who never looked our way came around and I bought my wife a suit for \$16 in three instalments. The cash price was only \$8. We toiled all day and all night to make the delicacies and kept improving on the taste.

We came up with a new item, *sotong bakar* (grilled dried squid), served in a spicy sauce. After grilling the squid, using a small hammer, I personally pounded the tough seafood until it became soft. When my health improved I used a heavier hammer to pound the squid on a steel railway sleeper. While I hammered away, Sutan Jenain would visit me, bringing some tobacco or cigarettes donated by our political friends. He spent time teaching my eldest girl Ayesha to ride a bicycle and to sing patriotic Indonesian songs such as *Indonesia Raya* and the fiery *Darah Rakyat* (The People's Blood). My family began to enjoy the three basic

needs economists talk about – food, shelter and clothing. They should add ‘medication’ as I was often in need of some. I enjoyed my conversations with Sutan Jenain, which sometimes covered socialism. I came to realise that two more items should be added to a man’s needs – entertainment and recreation – both items my family had yet to enjoy.

Our grilled squid was a big hit – it was a sell out on the first day – and demand kept growing. We made some money and were able to buy a new change of clothes. Through Sutan Jenain, a friend gave me an old bicycle I repaired for my oldest girl. I was also introduced to a Shell Company officer, Radin Mas Sumarto, who had just been posted from Bukom Island. It was at a party he threw for the Javanese community of Tanjung Karang that I tasted really delicious and nutritious food I had missed for years.

Soon after, our landlady doubled her commission, but we gave in. What else could we do? Not long after I earned the title of ‘the best maker of grilled squid.’⁴ One night, as usual we gathered at 8.00 pm to find out how our food did during the day. Those who made good sales smiled while those who did not looked glum. To my shock, not a single piece of my grilled squid had been sold. Undaunted, we still made some the next day – although we faced the same outcome. We made some on the following days and prayed hard; but strangely, our squid was left unsold. The landlady claimed our grilled squid smelled unpleasant, but my wife insisted that she had washed them thoroughly. Then it dawned on her why the landlady had been sneaking up on her each time she was cooking in the common kitchen. A week later, our suspicion was confirmed when the landlady’s son, who took pity on our family, said loudly so his mother could hear, “Pak Mustapha, mother hid your grilled squid and sold her own.”

I had not once thought this lady had the heart to ‘pour sand into our rice bowls’. Though poor, we had been good to her and she had known us from my lecturing days. I learned yet again that greed is boundless and even a friend could become a victim. We stayed on as we had little choice. We continued to sell grilled squid, not at the canteen, but by the roadside, facing the Selangor General Agency. My loyal friend Kundur, transported my grilled squid in his trishaw from our rented unit to the Sunday Market each day at 5.00 pm and back to my house at 11.00 pm. When the landlady tripled the rent on the excuse that the price of rice had increased, we begged for some understanding, but she shouted, “Those who cannot afford the rent can leave. There are many others keen to come in.” Angry tenants retaliated by destroying her light bulbs. The landlady screamed for my help as she was afraid her property would

be carted away. Since she was a wealthy lady, she had a lot to lose. The tenants then twisted water pipes and poked holes in the roofing. Loyal to each other, no one breathed a word.

One night, tragedy struck. A female tenant hanged herself by her long cloth waist binder. We were too late to save her. Just after her burial, a vampire cricket (*pelesit*) appeared while the tenants were busy reading Qur'anic verses. It perched first on the beam from which the woman had hanged herself and then moved to the husband's shirt hanging on a wall. From that day on, the vampire cricket made the eerie screeching sound from the *rambai* fruit tree outside the house every night at the time of her death, until the tree was felled.

One after another, the tenants left, including the now famous comedian, Ibrahim Din, who lived next to the tragic room. We could not leave; we had nowhere to go. My wife and children were indeed made of stern stuff. After all, they had endured far worse situations. They had hidden in the jungle during the Japanese Invasion; were left in Lumut while I was in Singapore for the formation of Malai Giyu Gun; sat frozen as a tiger fought with stray dogs under our farm-hut; hid themselves in a friend's hut during the Bintang Tiga days; were deserted again when I was imprisoned and had been told I would be hanged. Living in a house with a spooky history was nothing by comparison. I heard later that the landlady herself left the house. She should have learned not to exploit the poor.

Hawking Food at the Sunday Market

With capital totalling \$42, I bought a charcoal stove, some pots, a dozen small plates, some small forks, several stools and two round tables. I experimented on a sauce until the tasters, my children, confirmed that, "Father, this tasted great." After that, I began selling boiled squid, cockleshells and *kangkong* (watercress, a leafy green vegetable) served with my special spicy-sweet sauce. I was ashamed to be a food hawker, but went out bravely on the first day. This eating area, although called the Sunday Market, was actually open every night, with Saturday being the busiest time. During better days, I had taken my wife and children in my sports car to eat to our hearts' content at this Sunday Market. Now, I was scrounging five cents here and there hawking food in what was once my 'playground'.

Soon, shame and embarrassment dissipated, replaced by satisfaction that my boiled squid and cockleshells were strong favourites. I did a roaring business. My first customer was *satay*-seller Saaim who led the

proletarians of the area. He was the one who encouraged poor trishaw-pullers to buy my wares. These same trishaw-pullers fought to send me home free of charge at the end of each night. Later, Saaim recounted his deep sorrow to see me, an educated Malay, hawking food. Saaim has passed away, but his *satay* business is now run by his children in Penang. He could speak some English with a very pronounced ‘r’, much like a Scotsman. To repay his friendship, for a year, I supported his son’s studies in an English school even though I was financially unstable.

One of my former students was so sorry to see me hawking food that he donated \$10 (a princely sum then) to my daughter, but she returned the money. Two or three other students visited me at home, but most kept away from me for fear of the implications. I was a former detainee; to them, criminal and political offences were the same. This was in 1947, and Malaya was still a colony. When one student pretended not to see me, I was hurt. But years later, when I was living a much better life and was visiting former student Wan Abdul Aziz (former Chief Minister of Pahang), this student took my wife and children for a treat. I think he pretended not to see us because he could not bear to see his former lecturer and his daughter vending food by the roadside.

Our fate then was what locals might describe as ‘one foot already in the drain’. I felt deeply wounded and humiliated when Malay Government Servants, their pockets full of back pay, bought food by pointing at the goods with their canes. Their children could eat whatever they wished and could spend weekends watching movies, whereas my children enjoyed nothing. My eldest girl (then only twelve) and I stayed awake late into the night working hard to earn a pittance.

Some Malays refused to look my way, muttering under their breath, “Serves him right! He thinks he can oppose the white man! See what has happened?” Some distant relatives looked down on us and kept away. But every cloud has a silver lining; some sympathetic friends remained, and to this day I remember everyone’s reaction. My friends then were *satay*-sellers, trishaw-pullers and car-washers – all proletarians living underneath other people’s homes, renting rooms no better than holes. They were also my customers. That was my life day in and day out, but I managed to spend some time and energy for the MNP until it was banned by the British Government.

Tengah Restaurant (1948-52)

In 1948, with my brief experience selling boiled and grilled squid, I gathered the courage to rent three stalls at the Sunday Market. I was no

longer exposed to late night chills, which had almost killed me during my bout with pneumonia. The stall owner, Hamzah Tassir, popularly known as Amjah, could speak basic English which he had learned through evening classes. While negotiating the rent, he asked if I had any 'experience' apart from my squid business. Could I prepare 'special' noodles, 'special' tea, 'special this' and 'special that'? I asked myself, "If everything was so 'special', why did his business go down the tubes?" Surprised at his many questions, I explained that I was a government servant with no cooking experience, but was willing to learn. In the same breath, I asked, "Are you willing to teach me?" It seemed he was asking all those questions to ensure I would succeed in reviving his stall's popularity, which had lost out to mostly Indonesian competitors. The rent was fixed at \$40 per month with a \$400 down-payment in lieu of ten months rent. The astronomical sum of \$400 was obtained by pawning whatever remained of my wife's jewellery and borrowing \$200⁵ from my friend, former KMM member M.N. Othman. He was willing to loan more than the \$200, which was part of his back pay and handed to me in crisp and nice-smelling one-dollar notes. Thus, I too 'received back pay'!

We moved nearer to the Sunday Market and shared a house with kind Chik Nilam, wife of Customs Officer Enchik Mohamed. They were parents of Datuk Seri Suleiman bin Mohamed.⁶ I employed an Indonesian boy to prepare the noodles but he turned out to be temperamental and over-sensitive. On our busiest days, he would disappear. Later, he was seen working for a stall opposite ours. I was not surprised. After all, Amjah had prepared me for this!

I had yet to bring my wife into running the stall as I did not think it proper. One night, Amjah, who often helped me, did not appear. In walked four women and four children and I was forced to attempt cooking the noodles. Under the supervision of the stall-owner next door, I managed to follow his step-by-step instructions until four plates were ready. At that moment Amjah came running in. "What are you doing, Brother?" he asked. I replied, "I have cooked four plates of noodles. Four more to go!" Amjah instructed me, "Brother, give the four plates to the children; they won't know if it does not taste nice. Let me cook for the women; they are bound to be fussy." That day, I decided to become 'the best noodle-maker' and to incorporate some science into the art of cooking noodles.

Amjah 'lectured' me on how to make his basic sauce. The best stock, he said, was made from cattle femurs, which could be obtained free of charge if we bought the meat. He instructed me to use an American cleaver to crack the bones to expose the marrow. "See, if you use an American cleaver, the bones will break but not the chopper!" He kept

singing praises of his American-made cleaver. The bones were then boiled with onion sprigs and some nutmeg powder, after which he recommended, "See this stock? You should drink it. It will make you strong."

As a lecturer, I only needed to work with my mouth. Using a heavy cleaver to break the bones was not easy. So, I replaced cattle femurs with chicken bones bought from Saaim, the *satay*-seller. The American cleaver was replaced by a regular knife. My chicken stock was tastier than Amjah's and many people loved the taste. Amjah wrote down his 'special' noodle sauce recipe on a piece of paper. As soon as I memorised it, he burned the paper. "We must destroy this. This is big secret, Brother!" I liked his sauce; it could stay fresh for a couple of days and could be used for both fried noodles and noodles in gravy. Without his knowledge, I experimented on the sauce with my children as tasters. By adding some vinegar, sugar and fried dried prawns, it became a delicious spicy Malay vegetable salad dressing. Amjah was both surprised and proud that his simple noodle sauce was so versatile. He next showed me a tin of taste-enhancer called Ve-Tsin. He said, "This is another secret, Brother!⁷ After using, throw the tin out of sight. Do not let others see what we use." It was fun learning from him. He also taught me to cook beef steak and fried rice which I improved upon using tips from a recently released Hailam Chinese detainee who sold drinks in another part of town.

Next on my agenda was the equally important drinks department. Amjah told me that the best teas were brown like the colour of *chiku* fruit before the addition of one teaspoon of sugar and three teaspoons of condensed milk. "Brother, if you follow my instructions, you can economise on the milk. One tin can make fourteen to seventeen cups!" He could not stress enough the importance of boiling water. He also taught me to make coffee but coffee was not my stall's strong point, even though I ordered the coffee powder from a Nibong Tebal Malay coffee-maker, Osman Ahmad. It was only after adding some Nescafe into the mixture that customers begin to double. I also sold coffee-powder sent to me by train.

At about this time, Chik Aishah Ghani (later Minister of Social Welfare) opened her Kedai Sukaramai eatery next to ours. I knew her as a leftist freedom fighter and Padang Rengas was her stronghold.

A young man I had taught to make tea turned out to be a superb tea-maker and he attracted countless tea-lovers, even though my shop was rather far from the main road. That was why I called it the Tengah Restaurant (*tengah* meaning middle in Malay) as the shop was in the middle of the Sunday Market. This confirmed Amjah's words, "Brother, it does not matter where your stall is. If you serve delicious food and drinks, the customers will look for you."

I ran this stall from mid-1947 to 1952. My wife and children had to be brought into my business as I was short-handed. My two girls, Hendun and Ayesha aged thirteen and fifteen, helped serve the customers after school. My son, Adelain, only nine, was left in charge of four siblings since my children had increased from four to seven within five years. The three additions were born in the battered stall amidst the buzz of activity. I often had to shout to my children, "Please keep quiet; we are running a business." A baby daughter, Insun, slept in a cloth cradle under the counter. Sometimes my knee would knock her head as I rushed in to change money behind the counter. Luckily nothing happened to her – she graduated with an Economics degree from the University of Malaya in 1972. This baby was also the one who when not closely tended to, accidentally drank kerosene stored in a small soft drink bottle. Thankfully, we rushed her to the hospital in time.

My wife became the backbone of the business, toiling day and night, but never complained. I kept my end of the bargain except when I was not well, which was unfortunately quite often. A white woman customer reprimanded me for making my girls work till late at night. She said, "If I could, I would haul you to court!" I replied, "I know what you are saying, I am their father. I love my children and they should sleep early, but I have no choice, I need their help." But this concerned social worker did not give up. She kept chastising me.

Almost all my customers were Malays, around 90 per cent, with some Chinese and a handful of white men, including several Palestinian Police Inspectors.⁸ They could speak some Malay. There was a white couple who came to eat *gado-gado*, my spicy vegetable salad. Having once worked for Dunlop Plantations in Padang, West Sumatra, they claimed my *gado-gado* was as good as the one in Padang. So, I named my dish 'Gado-Gado Padang'. *Gado-gado* sounded like *gadu-gadu* which means 'to quarrel' in Malay, while a *padang* is a field. As a result the Palestinian Inspectors joked, "Do you mean to tell us that if we were to *gadu-gadu* (quarrel) we should go to the *padang* (field)?"

Among my customers was a hangman who often came to play light indoor games with my children, possibly to relax from his loathsome profession. Many Police Depot recruits also came to my shop on their days off. I had a tailor friend, Munir bin Said, whom I had known since 1935. When I last met him, in 1974, he was living in a huge house and his children were all successful professionals. He was so skilled that he was employed by the Gian Singh Company, the most famous and most expensive tailor for white clientele. He was the one who kept making little suggestions to improve my *gado-gado* to the extent it became so well

known that a group of Singaporean musicians offered to move me to Singapore. My Malay customers were easy to serve and were our main concern. Amjah said, "Brother, when you cook for a Malay, use very little garlic. But use lots for Chinese customers. For the Indians, add more shallots. Use no garlic at all for the white men. They can't even stand the smell. Even the knife you use should not smell of garlic." I listened to all his tips.

I did not forget to donate food and drinks to beggars who came around. I also remembered what the elders said, "When you do business, keep the jar of honey out front and the vinegar pot at the back." But a Chinese proverb is more apt, "If you do not know how to smile, do not attempt to open a shop," and "To open a business is simple but to make a success out of it is not as easy."

With some savings, I bought two bicycles for my two older children to ride to school, a refrigerator for my shop and a radiogram to entertain my customers. I also bought a thatch-roofed small shop-house; we lived at the back while running a small hand-wash laundry at the front. Although my eldest girl Ayesha was only 14, I sent her for hair-perming lessons at the most popular Chinese hair salon in Kuala Lumpur. In 1950 we opened 'Gadis Waving Salon'. In its July 1951 edition, *The Sunday Times* highlighted Ayesha as the "*Youngest Business Girl in Malaya*." Her first two customers came from the residence of Malaya's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. Later, when I was active in UMNO in Taiping in the early fifties, Tunku Abdul Rahman invited me to jointly open a hair-waving salon at UMNO House in Alor Star but I did not take up the offer.

Like most businesses, my stall had its highs and lows, reminding me of the tide. Once the low persisted for so long that I could almost see the ocean bed. But Amjah told me not to worry, "What you need is a blossom! I will get one for you. I saw a pretty and hard-working girl at the Post Office canteen. I have in fact been wanting to talk to you about hiring this girl at your shop." A little while later, the girl came. She was plump with rather short fingers, but according to my mother, women with short fingers are industrious. This girl was only too keen to leave her former work place as its owner wanted her as his second wife.

The girl was indeed capable, almost as good as any boy. True to Amjah's word, more male customers began filing in but she kept her distance. She was, however, prone to certain attacks bordering on hysteria, and we often had to carry her to the back of the shop to be revived. As soon as she recovered, she would be up on her feet and would continue working as if nothing had happened. She could carry eighteen glasses or

six plates of noodles at one go. Our restaurant was revived but she soon met a handsome and kind Malay clerk who married her. I met her again decades later, when she told her own father, “Enchik Mustapha is my father – he looked after me when I was a rather sickly girl.”

I then employed two girls who lived in our house. I can proudly say I was the first employer in the area to give my employees a day off on Mondays. On those days, I took them and my children to either Port Dickson or Morib beach in my jalopy, once owned by Enchik Maarof, the first Malay bank manager of the Malay Banking Ltd. Among my assistants were Mimah, Kiah, Yah, Tapa and Idris Basri (later a Selangor Member of Parliament). The girls found very kind husbands; one a village headman and the other a Bata Company employee. Another girl was also unwell – she often lapsed into long spells of semi-consciousness, sometimes for days, with an amused twinkle in her eyes. She would not eat and drink during those spells.

I accidentally discovered a side job when I noticed a man lavishly spending his money at my stall. He was an American International Assurance Company Ltd. (AIA) agent. I told myself, “If this man can hold this insurance job, I am sure I can too.” So, I visited the AIA manager. The job seemed easy enough but I needed transportation. I then bought an old motorcycle and started canvassing. My good friends were my first customers. The AIA manager was as pleased as punch when I started to bring in cases shortly after.

My wife ran the shop single-handedly while I canvassed. If my side job proved lucrative, we would close shop, in the interest of my growing children. I was very successful, but I soon found I was being followed by several CID officers. One afternoon, a detective who disliked me came to enquire, “Where were you earlier on?” I said, “Ulu Langat.” “For what reason?” he continued. “To sell insurance. If you are interested I can give you all the information you need.” He was furious and produced his pistol. I told him, “Go find someone else you can threaten. You cannot frighten me any more!” The next day the detective was transferred to another district. An invisible hand was protecting me. After that I bought Enchik Maarof’s car, the car no one wanted.

To the AIA manager’s utter dismay, I decided to give up my insurance profession. I could not guarantee that in my canvassing expeditions my feet would not take me to former familiar but dangerous grounds. I preferred to forego a high income rather than end up in prison again. I did not want to bother the Selangor police with sending men to follow me around. I chose to live by the adage, “Do not disturb a hornet’s nest!” Amidst the busy food business, I managed to look after my children to

the best of my ability and I continued with my politics despite being watched by certain authorities.

The Bohemian Tengah Restaurant

With pride, I write that my humble Tengah Restaurant was a popular rendezvous for famous artists and performers of Malaya. They included comedians Ibrahim Din, S.M. Salim and Ismail Bontak, who brought laughter and gaiety to my shop. Their favourite was noodles and milk tea. S.M. Salim (now Tan Sri) was then working with the Anti-Malaria Board while Ibrahim Din was a driver with the Forestry Department in Kepong. A group of Indonesian artists, Waluyo and company, had Frank Sullivan from the Australian High Commission as a patron. He even planned to send them to London but that never materialised. While browsing through their works, I was upset with a portrait of a shabby person appearing to be of Malay or Indonesian descent, holding his prized fighting cock. The group's favourite was fried rice garnished with pickled onions.

A group of musicians – calling themselves the Rindu Malam Music Party – was led by Johar, a Post and Telegraph Office employee, with Abbas and Baby Hasnah as members. Their popular opening tune was *Pelenggang, Dayung Anak Pelenggang*. They would come for a glass of tea before and after their performances. Sometimes the entire group ate at my shop. Another group had members who are now senior government officers. They often sat down to exchange ideas on student unions that they led.

Then there were the big-spenders – musicians from Griffin's Inn along Jalan Ampang. I had once entered the Inn during the day in my slippers; it was not a fitting place for a small eating shop owner. Led by a European named Dodo, members included Soliano and brothers, Abdul Hamid (now with Orchestra RTM), Chik Nona Oren and the now-famous singer Julie Sudiro. They would sit for hours at my shop after their performances to eat and drink the night away. Another group of big-spenders came from the Great Eastern Hotel and Cabaret.

Then there were the newspapermen and writers who chose 'Tengah Restaurant' for inspirational ideas. They included Asraf, his wife and his ASAS 50;⁹ Dahari Ali; Yusuf and others. Also in this group was my cousin Aziz Ishak (later Minister of Agriculture) and his group from *The Straits Times*. Then there were the pacifists and others. They all loved fried noodles. Two opera groups frequented my shop. One group was from the Malay Opera at Lucky World Amusement Park in Batu Road. These very

refined elderly performers sometimes took my children to the opera and sat them down in the reserve seats. Another was the Baba Hock Ronggeng dance group from Penang, whose pretty young performers adorned my shop nightly. The last two groups always hanging around were politicians and Special Branch officers. While the first group was there to disseminate political ideas, the second was there to quash them. There were also students and UMNO members brought in by Hamzah Alang, a KMM member already in UMNO.

I was a very lucky person. Is there another place, apart from the Left Bank in Paris, where so many artists and performers from all walks of cultural pursuit gather at a dilapidated stall?

Notes

1. *Translator's note:* My father had moved house twenty-three times in his seventy-seven years. I myself had attended seven schools in thirteen years before entering the University of Malaya.
2. I had repaid his kindness by sending food to his family and also assisted him with money during my better times.
3. The Selangor General Agency was a small KMM concern set up during the Japanese Occupation.
4. My wife deserves the praise.
5. I repaid my loan with fried noodles as dividends. I owe this man a great deal.
6. *Translator's Note:* Deputy Health Minister in early 2004.
7. Amjah was so fond of using the word 'secret' that Saaim once said, "To Amjah, everything is a secret. Maybe he is a secret agent!"
8. These Palestinian Inspectors were honest. Whenever they were posted out on short notice, they would send money from England to their friends in Kuala Lumpur to cover their debt. They loved to nibble my pickled onions like nuts, just like the Arabs.
9. ASAS 50 stands for Angkatan Sasterawan 50 (Literary Movement 50) established in Singapore in 1950. Although it was essentially a literary body, it participated in some social reform and political commentary.

Hawking Food (1947-52): Ibrahim's Secret Note

Moving house to the Sunday Market facilitated my visits to Dr Burhanuddin's place. I continued to advise him as well as respond to letters from Malay students in Cairo and Mecca promising support for MNP upon their return. I did this on the quiet for fear of being driven out of the Sunday Market or having my stall boycotted by right-wing Malays. It was one of several reasons I named my stall Tengah Restaurant (The Middle Restaurant). Fortunately, some friends were influential members of the Kampung Baru Administration Committee. One state executive council member was even willing to bring my job dismissal to the government's attention but nothing came of it.

Shifts in Leadership

In my effort to advance MNP's cause, I found Dr Burhanuddin to be a man of the people – industrious, sincere and helpful. He utilised religious knowledge obtained in Sumatra and India for the people's struggles. Unfortunately, he had a major weakness. In his book, *Dr Burhanuddin: Putera Setia, Melayu Raya*, Ahmad Boestamam described Dr Burhanuddin as honesty and dignity personified, but also as too trusting. This made it easy for 'wolves in sheep's clothing' to penetrate the MNP. Numerous so-called 'friends' were confided in that many MNP secrets leaked out to opponents. I had advised him to be more secretive and cautious; to avoid broadcasting his plans, which when introduced, would lack the surprise element; to reduce recitation of holy verses in his speeches; to focus on issues and the struggle of the people and to vary his speech content and delivery to arouse audience interest.

As a result, without Ishak Haji Muhammad's knowledge, efforts to transfer the MNP leadership from Dr Burhanuddin to him got underway. Ahmad Boestamam did not really know what moved a small group of MNP followers to remove Dr Burhanuddin from his presidency when he was strongly supported by nationalists all over the country. There were

other reasons for replacing Dr Burhanuddin, apart from protecting the MNP from enemy penetration, as mentioned by Ahmad Boestamam. We realised that MNP's strength lay in the support of left-wing non-Malay parties who had been studying the MNP since Dr Burhanuddin's return from India and Burma right until the declaration of The People's Constitutional Proposal for Malaya.

Firstly, they were wary of a Malaya-Indonesia union, especially when MNP was singing Indonesia's national song with great gusto and when Dr Burhanuddin was an obvious champion of the *Indonesia Raya* idea. Secondly, The People's Constitutional Proposal for Malaya was found unsatisfactory except to the colonialists and their supporters. Thirdly, Dr Burhanuddin struck no political deals in India. He seemed more enthralled by the Taj Mahal than in building links. Fourthly, Dr Burhanuddin had called on Aung San in Burma. Many non-Malay leftist parties and the MNP itself feared that, like Aung San, Dr Burhanuddin would be happy with just 'self-government within a Commonwealth'. The Burmese masses had wanted a free socialist republic and Aung San was later killed.

Ishak was unaware of this covert plan to appoint him MNP President. We sent Bahrum bin Abdul Basar (now in Lenggeng, Negeri Sembilan) to probe the matter. Ishak replied, "It is not easy to challenge Dr Burhanuddin. Further, he is already on a campaign trail." But we sent Bahrum to see Ishak again, this time with a more direct question: "If Dr Burhanuddin no longer wishes to be president, would you take over?" Ishak responded, "Yes, I am willing!" To avoid any confrontation, a secret meeting appointed a steering committee to propose that Dr Burhanuddin be elevated to Adviser. MNP members at the MNP Congress in Melaka will remember just how many identification documents each member had to bring along. Ahmad Boestamam wrote, "Dr Burhanuddin did not oppose the proposal at all; this shocked me. With that, followers who worshipped Dr Burhanuddin followed suit and supported the motion. When put to vote, Dr Burhanuddin won. The MNP constitution thus needed an amendment to incorporate a new Adviser position."

At my stall, I waited for the result of this motion. I thanked God that it went unopposed. Thus, MNP was able to move at a faster pace and with greater intensity under the leadership of Dr Burhanuddin and Ishak, both politicians of the highest calibre.

Dr Burhanuddin's Meeting with the CID Chief

With a firm hand, the British Government started to ban leftist Malay and non-Malay parties. API was the first. Perhaps the British perceived

API to be a bigger threat than the MNP. Sensing trouble, I took steps to prolong MNP's life. I contacted an officer and Hashim 'Misai', both with the CID, to provide a greater insight into MNP from the British perspective. I even made an appointment for Dr Burhanuddin to meet with the CID. When Dr Burhanuddin asked, "What are you up to?" I explained, "A CID jeep will be here soon. Just go with them. I guarantee you will come home. Just explain that MNP is a legitimate body with a constitution and is run along UN-approved outlines. Even if there were MNP members who disappeared into the jungle, those were individual cases, and should not reflect on the party."

As Dr Burhanuddin climbed into the CID jeep that took him to the Jalan Campbell Police Station, my neighbours muttered in Minang dialect, "Today, one is being hauled. Tomorrow, the other one will go too." But Dr Burhanuddin returned to my stall within two hours. MNP was allowed to function a little while longer, long enough for it to meet in Singapore where it was recommended that the MNP struggle be continued by our friends in Indonesia.

Proclamation of Independent Malaya to the United Nations

I found that Ibrahim Yaakub, who was supposed to advance Malaya's Independence struggle from Indonesia with the money provided to him, did nothing except become richer. So, in 1948, with friends like Sidin Amin and Jalil, we mailed Malaya's Independence proclamation to the UN and 68 member nations, to replace the declaration which should have taken place on 17 August 1945 had the Japanese not surrendered. Had India not declared its independence several times before the momentous day arrived? The postage was collected from leftist friends living in Kampung Baru. One of them, an active API member, now (1976) in the National Front, joined us, but prefers to remain anonymous.

Secret Note from Ibrahim Yaakub

Again, I was almost a victim. Old friends were beginning to contact me. My stall was being watched by two to four Special Branch policemen who came in as customers, either at my stall, or next door. A CID officer once tried to grab a note from my hand, but I managed to throw it into my lit charcoal stove. One night, Kuala Lumpur CID Chief Mr Stafford (I think that was his name) visited my stall. He asked me to describe my 'attitude' towards the British. I pointed to two white men, Charley Bone and Georgi, who were seen playing with my young children, "Please observe and make your own conclusions as to whether I hate whites.

See how at home those two men are!” I added that there were white customers who ate on credit but cleared their bills at the end of the month. I hope Mr Stafford returned with a positive view and learned not to believe every word spoken by his juniors. From then on, I sensed less ‘eyes’ on my shop.

One Saturday night, always my busiest, Abdullah Zawawi, then the PAS secretary general, rushed into my shop. In a flash, he handed me a tiny folded note, coated with wax and concealable in one’s mouth. Just as quickly he disappeared into the crowd. I hid the letter in my pocket, to be read later. If I remember rightly, this was in 1949, during the Malayan Emergency. When business was over, as usual, Saaim and I sat down to relax and enjoy our own ‘feast’. He would donate his leftover *satay* while I served him drinks. It was this kind of light entertainment that kept me going.

Once home, I read the secret note. Written in *Jawi* (Malay in Arabic script) and in red ink, it read very simply, “You are required to set up the Third Force as soon as possible. *Benzin* (petrol in the Indonesian language, but meaning money here) will be sent.” Signed IBHY (Ibrahim Yaakub). It sounded very simple; Ibrahim was instructing me to set up a new political party, the Third Force, to balance the First Force (UMNO) and the Second Force (MNP).

Did Ibrahim not know I was a poor man working to the bone every night? I lacked sleep, my children were badly neglected, and Malaya was in an Emergency with checkpoints every other mile manned by police, Gurkhas and British troops. Most freedom fighters in Kuala Lumpur knew that Ibrahim, with his new name, Iskandar Kamel, was already a wealthy man in Indonesia. Now, he expected more sacrifices from my friends and I, some of whom were already detained in camps in Majidi, Johore; Ashby Road, Ipoh and Tanjung Bruas, Melaka! I had lost my job and been detained in lock-ups and a prison from 1945 to 1946. My family was just about to enjoy basic necessities. Now, Ibrahim wanted me to return to hunger and poverty. I still had one foot in the drain!

If Ibrahim were equally responsible, I was willing to make further sacrifices. But looking at my own self, Dr Burhanuddin, Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak and 150 MNP members now in detention, I begged to be excused. Had I successfully set up the new force, Ibrahim’s wallet would fatten with assistance from the Indonesian President. He could conveniently claim, “Mustapha is my man, the Third Force has been set up under my sponsorship. Soon, you can expect some explosions in the Malayan jungle.” I would like to note here that to this day (in 1976), I have yet to receive a drop of *benzin* from Ibrahim.

Major Woodrow Wyatt, English MP,¹ and UMNO's Constitution

Just like many leftist party leaders from several countries, Britain's John Brazier, Malaya's Trade Union Adviser, was one of my customers. One night, while I was busy cooking, he came to tell me, "Finish whatever you are doing and come to my table. I want you to meet an important political figure." After handing over the cooking to my wife, I walked over, and Mr Brazier introduced me to Major Woodrow Wyatt, a Member of Parliament (Labour) from England and author of *Theories and Practices of Socialism*, a book I had read.

Our conversation, focusing on Malaya's politics, soon came to the pertinent question, "Which is a more influential party, UMNO or MNP?" I explained that it depended on the locality. UMNO had strong support from town Malays. "But in my opinion, there is only one political party, MNP, as it already has a constitution", I added. Major Wyatt asked in a surprised tone, "What about UMNO? Is it not a political party too?" I replied, "UMNO is merely a collection of many organisations with diverse interests, made up of government servants, teachers, village headmen, businessmen, child education associations and dramatic societies. UMNO does not even seem to have a constitution." He turned to Mr Brazier to ask, "Is that true?" Mr Brazier said he thought so too.

Major Wyatt commented, "Only yesterday I met with Datuk Onn. I will have to see him again tomorrow." They left my stall, leaving me with many questions running through my head. Once again, the familiar question arose – would I be arrested or detained? I no longer cared. After all, I had pointed out some truths about the Malay struggle. Not long after, UMNO was busy arranging meetings to draft and produce a constitution that would last. No one knew who had indirectly brought 'life' into UMNO as an organisation.

Visits by Nationalist Writers and Leaders

Apart from British officers, Indian and Burmese reporters and political leaders came to see me after my cousin Aziz Ishak told them, "If you want to meet a Malay leftist freedom fighter, go to the Tengah Restaurant." My meetings with these nationalists from abroad always started off with patriotic exchanges of hugs and handshakes. The Indians came in their sandals while the Burmese wore slippers. They usually carried satchels. I was always in my white singlet and a red sarong, with one hand holding my cooking ladle.

I continued politicking. It was good that I ran an eating stall as politics could not feed my family, who seemed to understand my struggle, unlike

Dr Burhanuddin's family in Singapore. Dr Burhanuddin had once told me, "It is easy for you, your wife understands. It is very hard for me. They do not want to understand." He often asked me to convince his wife of our cause.

Contributing to Indonesia's Struggle (1946-49)

I made some contribution to Indonesia's (home of my forefathers) nationalist struggle. During the Malayan Emergency, when not a single soul dared to fly the Indonesian *Sang Saka Merah Putih* flag, I hoisted it from my Sunday Market stall on 17 August 1949, to celebrate Indonesia's 4th National Day. I closed my shop that day in gratitude to the Almighty.

A week before, I had met with prominent Indonesian residents in Kampung Baru and Kuala Lumpur as well as members of the Indonesian Independence Association. They were afraid to celebrate the day, but agreed to attend if I arranged a celebration. So, I cycled around to collect donations, sent invitations, arranged the venue and invited two speakers. It was a special day for Indonesia and I.

That afternoon, a tea party was held at the Wong Kee Garden Café along Batu Road, attended by about a hundred Indonesians and leftist Malays. Radin Mas Sumarto (last seen living in Tasik Malaya, Indonesia) spoke on the Indonesian struggle from 1941 towards Independence. Munir bin Said, now living in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur, elaborated on their political and military struggle against the Dutch from 1945 until 1949. The delivery engrossed many, who later came to ask me where I had found these two wonderful speakers. They wondered if the two would assist them some day. I replied, "Do ask them yourselves. But I assure you they only take one kind of bait, that of patriotism." Throughout the celebration, I feared a call from the police but nothing happened, and I was thankful.

That same day, my children, who had suffered much, were given an opportunity to enjoy themselves to the full. After treating ourselves to the *bangsawan* opera, we took a family photo. We still have this photo, which survived our many moves. I had five children then: Ayesha, Hendun, Adelain, Dinah and Insun. The photo was captioned: "17-8-1949 – Fourth Indonesian Independence Day."

Assisting a Young Indonesian Lieutenant

Living amidst Indonesians and Malays, I came to hear of many problems faced by the poor. Although a committee ran Kampung Baru, there were matters not to be left to them, especially those concerning the Indonesians.

One day, Bahrum came with a truly sad story of a young Indonesian, Lieutenant Zulkifli, living on the third floor of a Batu Road building. The Selangor Police was to deport him to Indonesia. He was, in fact, waiting for a ship in Port Swettenham, but his wife and children were without any food and milk. I cycled all over Kampung Baru to collect donations from friends, for Bahrum to pass on to the poor family.

As I was a mere citizen, I brought the matter to the attention of my cousin Aziz Ishak, then a member of the Federal Council and close to Malaya's High Commissioner, Sir Gerald Templer. Aziz did not waste any time. He left in his car to meet with the Selangor Chief Police Officer. I don't know if he spoke to Templer. However, we managed to appeal to the British to let the young lieutenant be reunited with his family and to repatriate them together. Both Aziz and Bahrum should be commended for their kindness.

Changing UMNO's Slogan in Early 1951

Two Special Branch groups kept watch on my stall. The first was supposed to protect me, and the other to destroy me, convinced as they were that they were on to something. In the meantime, I continued to run my stall and serve my loyal customers. It was already 1951, yet no signs indicated UMNO under the leadership of Datuk Onn was heading towards Independence. My friends and I knew it was time the sacred word '*Merdeka*' be entrenched in the hearts of Malays who aspired to gain their liberation from British rule. The late Hamzah Alang, Kuala Lumpur UMNO Division Secretary and a Member of Parliament for Kapar in Selangor, agreed with me that UMNO's slogan be changed from *Hidup Melayu* (Long Live the Malays) to *Merdeka* (Independence). An UMNO ship with a new engine could sail into the 'Harbour of Independence', but would the skippers want to change the slogan? That was a major question. I told Hamzah Alang and his friends, "If the skipper is not willing, what then?" Hamzah replied, "We leave him and look for another skipper!" They were determined.

Not long after, my loyal follower, Gariieb Raof (a Johore UMNO Youth leader) told me he was leaving for Indonesia to take the UMNO struggle there. I appealed to him to delay his departure so he could propose the new slogan at UMNO's twice-yearly General Assembly in March 1951, two months away. A fiery speaker, much like President Soekarno of Indonesia, Gariieb agreed to campaign in the South, while Hamzah would handle the North. As a result, the '*Merdeka*' slogan was received with thunderous applause² which reached my stall not far from

the Sulaiman Club. I thanked God; this victory was significant in the Malay struggle for Independence.

Getting Involved with the Malay Newspaper, *Melayu Raya* (1950)

In early 1950, many former MNP leaders decided to establish a daily, which would promote the MNP struggle as well as those of other banned leftist Malay parties. *Melayu Raya*, labelled 'The Malay National Independent Daily', was born on 29 August 1950. I was appointed a correspondent and distributor. My KMM friend Idris Hakim agreed to let me use the run-down Selangor General Agency as an office. In a car bought from Enchik Maarof, the Malay bank manager, I drove around Kuala Lumpur doing the best I could.

I moved with my cousin Aziz Ishak, *Utusan Melayu*'s Kuala Lumpur correspondent, whose office was opposite ours. He showed no hint of rivalry; in fact, he introduced me to writers from the other Malay and English dailies. The Sunday Market stall-owners whispered, "Looks like our noodle seller is trying to become a journalist." I gave my all and shouldered my responsibilities with one objective, the sacred Independence of Malaya. The initial response to *Melayu Raya* was cold, as we were up against the established *Utusan Melayu*, but it gradually warmed. The main problem which I brought to the *Melayu Raya* editorial board's knowledge was the paper's late arrival in Kuala Lumpur, usually three or four hours after *Utusan Melayu*. I almost died from a car accident due to rushing about, and vendors refused to receive stale dailies.

***Melayu Raya* and the Nathrah Riots**

In December 1950, what was described as religious riots broke out in Singapore over Nathrah, a young Dutch girl adopted by a Malay woman during the Japanese Occupation. Her adoptive mother, Mak Minah, had married her off to a Malay man, Mansor Adabi, son of Abdul Kadir Adabi, my KMM friend who moved with me and the Fujiwara Kikan. Nathrah's real mother, Mrs Hertogh, had obtained a court approval to declare the marriage null and void as the girl was only thirteen. Consequently, the couple was forced to separate. Religious riots, never before experienced in Singapore, broke out. Both the *Utusan Melayu* and the *Melayu Raya* took advantage of the situation to sell their papers. *Utusan Melayu* merely reported the events, but *Melayu Raya* got itself involved in the riots, which led to many arrests and loss of life.

I sent a cable to Singapore requesting a *Melayu Raya* founding member to come to Kuala Lumpur. The founders I knew included Dr Bur-

hanuddin, Ahmad bin Abdul Rahman (later a strong UMNO member in Melaka) and Abdul Hamid Abdul from Melaka who was active in MNP. The one who came was Dr Burhanuddin. I did not waste time telling him to instruct the *Melayu Raya* office in Singapore to stop involving itself in the dangerous religious crisis. “We should do what *Utusan Melayu*³ is doing. Be cautious and not be seen to be involved. What happened in Singapore is not a simple or small matter. Properties have been destroyed and lives lost.” I pointed out several clear indications of *Melayu Raya*’s involvement. “Should we carry on, the Federal Police may ban the sale of our paper, at least in Malaya.” Dr Burhanuddin replied, “This is a test of the Malay faith.” I realised we saw the issue very differently.

I asked him to stay in Kuala Lumpur a day or two to watch the CID men sitting near the daily’s office. But what could I do to save a leftist daily when a small, but vicious group was accusing me of being a police agent? I withdrew when the *Melayu Raya* Head Office quietly sent a new correspondent. I was upset that no one from *Melayu Raya* had broken the news to me. Nevertheless, I left graciously after introducing the new representative to Aziz Ishak. Finally, *Melayu Raya* closed shop – once again, another end to Malay investment. Dr Burhanuddin, *Melayu Raya*’s leader, was detained under the Emergency laws. Nathrah was taken home to Holland and married off to someone of her own ‘race’. I don’t know what happened to Mansor Adabi.

Notes

1. I don’t remember the year, but I have a letter from Major Woodrow Wyatt dated 2 September 1977, confirming our meeting at my stall, Tengah Restaurant.
2. See the front page headline of *Utusan Melayu*, March 1951, “UMNO Youth Alliance Proposal Won. *Merdeka* replaced *Hidup Melayu*.”
3. *Utusan Melayu* was extremely cautious over the Nathrah issue.

Contesting the Post of UMNO President (1951)

This episode of my life is about my contesting the UMNO President's post to replace the late Datuk Onn Jaafar. In 1950, UMNO President Datuk Onn had put forward a proposal to make UMNO (United Malay National Organisation) the United Malaya National Organisation. But his idea was too advanced for his conservative political party. The Malays of 1950, except for former MNP members, were unprepared to accept a broader concept of nationalism. The proposal would be Datuk Onn's last within UMNO. Consequently, Datuk Onn left UMNO to found the Independent Malaya Party (IMP). His son, Enchik Hussein (later Tun Hussein Onn, third Prime Minister of Malaysia) also quit UMNO to join his father.

I was still running the Tengah Restaurant at the Kuala Lumpur Sunday Market and leading a hand to mouth existence most days. When Datuk Onn made known his wish not to be re-nominated as UMNO President, UMNO members, big and small, were busy searching for a prospective candidate. At that time, the Malayan Emergency was still on. Many of my friends, leaders and members of the banned left-wing Malay parties API, AWAS, GERAM and MNP were in detention in several camps: Pulau Jerejak, Ashby Road Camp in Ipoh, Tanjung Bruas in Melaka and Majidi in Johore. Sutan Jenain was nowhere to be seen. Friends told me he was a Class A detainee at the St John Island near Singapore, awaiting deportation to Indonesia. I suddenly realised I had no friends with whom to discuss the latest and hottest political news. My world was indeed a lonely one. I also realised that left-wing Malays no longer owned a vehicle (party); the only Malay vehicle available was the feudalistic and elitist UMNO. Could this vehicle serve us if the steering was switched from right to left?

One night in July 1951, my cousin Aziz Ishak, former leader of the banned GERAM and now an *Utusan Melayu* representative, came to enquire if I had heard Datuk Onn's announcement. He then asked pointedly, "What are you waiting for?" I replied, "Please give me some

time to mull this over. It is a big decision.” Soon, friends from the former Japanese-sponsored volunteer army Malai Giyu Gun, MNP, API, friends already in UMNO and some outside UMNO, appealed that I contest the post. They pledged allegiance to serve me in all undertakings to promote the Malay cause.

I thought about my family; they seemed quite ready to run the stall by themselves should I be hauled in and detained by the British. They seemed able to fend for themselves. I knew that the Emergency laws were cold and cruel. British police could search homes without warrants; not more than five people could congregate; anyone could be detained for any length of time. But I could not be separated from politics. I had been actively struggling for Independence since my youth. Nevertheless, many questions arose: Was I willing to take over a right-wing party to replace a banned left one? Were my friends in UMNO sufficiently large in number to give me the needed votes? Would right-wing politicians stand still in the face of attempts by left-wing Malays to take over their political empire?

Would their sponsor, the British Government, just look on, knowing my political ideologies? If I, a leftist, were elected, I would probably nationalise all colonial capitalist concerns that had been ‘blood-sucking leeches’ for far too long. Would I be bundled off before the election proper? There were laws allowing such action! Were I to win, would I be able to free friends from the various detention camps? After the implementation of self-government in his country, Nkrumah had freed his friends, one by one, to fill his cabinet.

With the understanding that contesting the post of UMNO president would advance gaining Malaya’s Independence came the dawning realisation that I was ready. With support from friends and encouragement from Aziz Ishak, three days later I informed Aziz of my willingness. We checked UMNO’s constitution and found that any ordinary UMNO member could stand for election as President. I agreed to contest the post with great sincerity and the genuine desire to achieve Malaya’s Independence.

So, on 24 June 1951, the poor noodle-seller that I was became a candidate for UMNO’s Presidency. *Utusan Melayu*’s 24 June 1951 edition carried a front-page lead, “Former KMM Leader Proposed to Replace Datuk Onn.” It stated that the Kuala Lumpur UMNO Youth would hold an emergency meeting to nominate me. After the headline story, in interviews with several dailies, I revealed my slogan. If the Indonesian President’s slogan was ‘Once Independent; Always Independent’, mine was ‘Once a Freedom Fighter, Always a Freedom Fighter’. The dailies ran stories on my role in KMM and MNP.

Many reactions followed, including an announcement of contenders to be suggested by other UMNO branches, including Sardon Jubir, Datuk Hamzah Abdullah, Captain Hussein Onn and Dr Ismail bin Abdul Rahman. But an influential UMNO member, Haji Ahmad Fuad, highlighted in the 1 July 1951 *Utusan Melayu* that the best candidate would be “an active man with great determination, knowledgeable in Malayan politics, not in government service and aged between 38 and 45.”

On 3 July 1951, another *Utusan Melayu* piece reported that “According to reports from Kuala Lipis, many found Enchik Mustapha an attractive candidate to replace Datuk Onn as UMNO President because he meets almost all the requirements.” It added, “Under the leadership of such a man, UMNO could meet its objectives more clearly and actively for the benefit of the Malays, particularly the rural Malays.” I was strongly supported in Perak. *Utusan Melayu* of 1 July 1951 reported “*Utusan Melayu* had met with Perak’s representative to the UMNO Working Committee Meeting, Enchik Nasruddin bin Rais yesterday... he has no objections to the nomination of Enchik Mustapha because he said UMNO was looking for an independent man knowledgeable in politics to work for the good of the people.”

In the meantime, at an UMNO meeting, Datuk Onn asked, “Has Enchik Mustapha become an UMNO member?” Hamzah Alang, a former KMM member who was then Kuala Lumpur UMNO Youth Secretary, took it upon himself to enrol me. (The truth was, I had earlier advised Hamzah Alang to join UMNO and fight from within UMNO. He had at one time said, “If Chikgu (me) asked me to leave UMNO, I would leave UMNO.”) With Hamzah Alang’s help, I became a member of the Kampung Baru UMNO Branch. Luckily, I was already free of the conditions imposed on me by the British since 1946. I was perhaps the first UMNO member enrolled in a flash and was the only UMNO member ever nominated as President before becoming a member. This will not be repeated as UMNO rules and regulations were tightened after the event.

The competition soon heated up. *Utusan Melayu*’s announcement was answered by its rival, *Majlis*,¹ a conservative right-wing paper led by Melan Abdullah.² I did not dare campaign because invisible barriers laid by the British were quite visible to me, an experienced left-wing politician. My shop was ‘fenced’ by four CID men day and night. Homes of friends who could campaign for me were similarly treated; the given reason being that it was for their safety.

I had planned to garner support in Melaka and Perak. It was not too late to motivate the pro-feudal Malays of Perak and Melaka towards the people’s struggle. But why were my former MNP friends and Dr

Burhanuddin's followers not behind me? Was there something I did not know about? Unable to visit both states, I stayed at my stall and continued to fry noodles, while other candidates zoomed about in cars in frenzied campaigns to defend their party. I did not blame them; they were trying to protect their fortresses from being taken over.

According to the press, the late Datuk Abdul Razak bin Datuk Hussein (later Tun, second Prime Minister of Malaysia) was unwilling to contest UMNO's Presidency, but managed to persuade Tunku Abdul Rahman, a Kedah prince, to do so. Tunku was a Public Prosecutor who was quite unhappy with the way the British treated him. He was only allocated a small office desk near some corridor and his Jalan Pekeliling (now Jalan Tun Razak) quarters³ was far from satisfactory.

The campaign was so intense that I began to feel that my safety was in danger. I went to see Aziz Ishak to devise a strategy to protect me from the police. We came up with the idea of publishing a news article about my political struggles – from my days as KMM Vice President to my arrest, imprisonment and dismissal, and finally reduced to a Sunday Market stall-owner. The article was meant to fish for sympathy from the masses. Should I be arrested, my family would hopefully receive some support and my stall would not be boycotted. It was all I asked for. I don't know if I succeeded in gaining the people's sympathy.

Personal and Political Analysis

I made a detailed analysis of my right to politics and the consequences for a proletarian like me to take over someone else's fort, which was well-protected by impregnable thick walls, steel doors, and armed guards. The first Malay political party founded after the Japanese Surrender in 1945 was the MNP, to replace KMM, banned by the British for allegedly siding with the Japanese during World War II. Weren't KMM members Japanese Fifth Columnists? Was KMM's secret abbreviation not KAME, the Japanese word for 'tortoise', an amphibian that does not know retreat? The MNP was to continue KMM's stalled struggle. Thousands of Malays had joined the MNP, fully realising the right of a people to be free in their homeland, as promised by the Atlantic Charter. My friends and I discussed names we expected the UMNO Supreme Council to suggest as candidates:

- Datuk Abdul Razak bin Datuk Hussein (later Tun, second Prime Minister of Malaysia), UMNO Youth President. If he were to contest, my chances were good because of my seniority and my political experience.

- Sardon Jubir (later a Cabinet Minister) was too young, as noted by both the press and UMNO members. In terms of qualifications and experience, I had an edge as I had led a left-wing Malay political party based on the Young Turk Movement; had participated in the war to liberate Malaya; had been dismissed from a government position; and had been jailed and was now an independent businessman.
- Dr Ismail bin Datuk Abdul Rahman (later Deputy Prime Minister) was young and tied down to the government.

Then, Tunku Abdul Rahman (later the first Prime Minister), a Kedah prince, came into the picture. On 23 July 1951, a month after news of my nomination was published, *Utusan Melayu* reported that “Tunku Abdul Rahman was willing to contest the UMNO President post.” He was to resign from his government post. I had heard of the Tunku while he was serving as a Magistrate and District Officer in Kedah. He was commendable in character, loved football and the races, and was often portrayed as a prince of the people. There were many stories about his kindness.

I had heard that soon after the capitulation of Singapore on 15 February 1942, the Tunku had arrived there to look for his brother-in-law, Volunteer Captain Raja Aman Shah. Until today, I feel truly sorry that the Tunku was not ‘moved’ by God to seek me out. Together, we could have worked to free Captain Raja Aman Shah because I knew where he was detained. I was then monitoring the whereabouts and affairs of Malay soldiers and volunteers trapped after the British surrender. I was prepared to appeal to the Japanese Command to release him. We are all God’s children. With support from the people and friends, I emboldened myself to contest against this giant of a rival. I was in high spirits; it was 1951, and I was only 41. I felt I could win. If KMM could save almost two battalions of Malay soldiers, officers and volunteers, why couldn’t my friends help me?

What I write now is what I can still remember after almost a quarter of a century. After the announcement, many of my Malay customers came to socialise with me. My European customers, shocked to see my photo in the press, came to ask me if it was true. Who would have thought a noodle-shop owner would be contending for the highest post in a Malay political body? A little apprehensively, these Europeans wanted to know what kind of foreign policies I would implement for Malaya. I explained that I was going to demand full independence; all policies were to be decided by the locals, with the British implementing decisions only where necessary. They seemed happy with my answer and expressed their wish to continue their service in an Independent Malaya under my leadership. Then they ordered their usual bottles of beer.

UMNO Presidential Elections

The UMNO Youth Alliance Third Annual Convention (Persidangan Tahun Ketiga Majlis Mesyuarat Perikatan Pemuda UMNO) met on 28 July 1951 to vote in their candidates. The meeting was chaired by Tan Sri Haji Mohd Noah bin Omar, UMNO's Permanent Chairman. Somehow, the meeting decided on an open voting system, with the raising of hands, instead of the usual secret ballot.⁴

If I am not mistaken, in the election for President, I lost to Tunku Abdul Rahman by only one vote.⁵ I received 16 votes, while the Tunku received 17. This prompted my supporters to nominate me for the Deputy President's post. Datuk Abdul Razak, who had refused to contest in the presidential election, was ready to take me on. An *Utusan Melayu* editorial, dated 1 August 1951, expressed, "It is rather odd that Datuk Abdul Razak did that." The results were shocking; we both gained nine votes each. To settle the issue, Chairman Tan Sri Haji Noah bin Omar, later father-in-law to Datuk Abdul Razak, gave the casting vote to his prospective son-in-law.⁶ Again, I lost by one vote, this time due to the Chairman's casting vote. There was dissatisfaction and protests about the unfair open voting system with Datuk Abdul Razak attending. A protest was made by UMNO Youth to *Utusan Melayu*, calling for a re-vote, but the UMNO Youth had made a serious mistake. Their protest should have been made spontaneously at the meeting and not after.⁷

After such near misses in my effort to grab the two top posts, I was voted in as UMNO Vice President⁸ (there was only one vice president), but I turned it down. There was not much I could do to help Malays gain Independence if I had to serve two right wing leaders. Throughout the voting, unlike Datuk Abdul Razak, I could not even leave my house. I had been warned by British agents to stay indoors, with threats of arrest and detention. Although I was disappointed that the voting was carried out in an unfair manner, from another angle, I was pleased. I felt happy I had received such a major vote of confidence, even though I had been out of the political scene for many years, and despite being a left-wing politician. From yet another angle, it was a blessing that I lost. Had I won, I am not sure what the British government would do to me and my family. I did not fear the consequences as I had suffered months of imprisonment before, but what would victory mean if my hands were tied? Were I to be detained, I would not be able to help promote the Malay interest. As a free man, from the outside, I could still contribute in some way.

Notes

1. Please see Ibnu Muslim's article in *Harakah*, 19 May 1989: "According to Pak Melan Abdullah, the *Utusan Melayu* supported Enchik Mustapha Hussain while *Majlis* supported Tunku Abdul Rahman.... And this proves that Enchik Mustapha's influence among the people was greater than that of Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Kedah prince.... But because of his feudal and high-birth, Tunku Abdul Rahman defeated Enchik Mustapha Hussain with just one vote to gain the UMNO President's post."
2. In an article in *Bacaria*, 31 January 1987, Hussain Yaacob wrote: "Datuk Melan admitted that as an editorial board member of *Majlis*, he campaigned for Tunku Abdul Rahman."
3. I had visited Tunku Abdul Rahman's house together with Datuk Melan Abdullah, who introduced me as a presidential candidate. He said to the Tunku, "If Che Mustapha were to lose and you were to win, please give him the vice presidency."
4. 'Pemuda UMNO', *Utusan Melayu*, 1 August 1951. This article is appended to Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 27, p. 650.
5. See 'Mustapha – a Leader in Nationalism; a Hero Who Worked Behind the Scenes', *New Straits Times*, 22 January 1987. This article is appended to Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 29, p. 652.
6. See editorial 'Pemuda UMNO', *Utusan Melayu*, 1 August 1951.
7. According to the editorial 'UMNO Youth' in *Utusan Melayu*, 1 August 1951, "After the convention, there were heated discussions among UMNO Youth delegates on the running of the convention, but objections should have been voiced at the meeting itself. They objected that the election was not through secret balloting as it should have been whenever candidates were present. Many felt that the chairman should have had secret balloting.... *Utusan Melayu* is of the opinion that UMNO Youth must trust their own judgement and not be afraid to follow their hearts and minds. The country's fate is in their hands. If the Malay youth continue to idolise rulers, *datuks* and the feudal elite, the future of the Malay race seems hopeless."
8. See *UMNO Malaya Secretariat Circular 75/51*, dated 2 August 1951 which records my name as Vice Presidential candidate and 'Mustapha – A Leader in Nationalism' by Noraini Shariff, *New Straits Times*, 22 January 1987. The UMNO circular is appended as Mustapha Hussain, 1999: Appendix 28, p. 651.

Back to Taiping (1952)

I returned to Taiping in 1952 after my unsuccessful bid to replace Datuk Onn Jaafar as UMNO President. It was risky to stay on at the Sunday Market. Old political friends, including Ibrahim Yaakub, had begun to pressure me into 'doing something' which the British could translate as subversive. The Malayan Emergency was still on and I did not want to spend more time in detention. Further, my children's education was at stake; the noisy Sunday Market was no place for them.

Leaving a business I had built from scratch, one that had provided food for my family for five years, was a sad and painful decision. Before leaving, I sought Raja Ahmed Hisham for advice. Late one afternoon, he was surprised to find me waiting on the veranda of his house. He said, "I did not think Che Mustapha would want to come to my house. Is there something wrong?" I told him everything was fine. He then asked if one particular detective was still 'bothering' me. I was right all this while in suspecting that I was being followed! With God's Grace, I had a protector in the form of a very influential person, Raja Ahmed Hisham. That explained the detective's immediate transfer to Langat or Kajang.

I told Raja Ahmed Hisham that the detective no longer caused me any trouble and from our conversation, it seemed everything that happened to me at the Sunday Market was within Raja Ahmed Hisham's knowledge. He was then the Special Branch Malay Section Chief. When I expressed my decision to return to Perak, he asked with concern, "But I believe your business here is doing well!" I replied, "Yes, but for the sake of my children's education it is best we leave the market place atmosphere." With full sympathy, Raja Ahmed Hisham enquired again, "Is there anything I can do?" I asked for the name of Taiping's Special Branch Chief, and asked if I could convey his (Raja Ahmed Hisham's) good wishes to the person. He said, "Please!"

I sold off my business and left with one wife and seven children, three of whom were born amidst the Sunday Market's hustle and bustle. The ancient Austin Ten no one dared to drive brought us back to my home state, Perak. I carried \$3,000 with me.

Setting Up an Insurance Agency

We stayed in Matang for a while, then squatted at the home of Hamzah A. Cunard, before renting a small wooden house in Kampung Boyan, Taiping. I set up a General and Life Insurance Agency in the Osman Bakery along Taiping's Main Road. The bakery owner, Mamak Osman, was my father's great friend to whom I owe a great deal. I canvassed for business every day from early morning till late at night. Haji Zainuddin, a visiting teacher in Bagan Serai, joked, "You have been coming to my house so often that my cockle-shelled yard is now eroded." (In those days, cockle-shells were strewn all over the yard to avoid muddy patches after a rain.)

An almost insurmountable problem confronted me; the Malay community was not open to the concept of insuring oneself, caused by their fear of its religious implications. I tried to quote Winston Churchill's words, which goes something like this, "If I had my way, I would make everyone buy an insurance policy." The Malays I met retorted, "That is in England; we are not England." I searched for all kinds of explanations to win their confidence, until one bright and sunny afternoon, while I was canvassing in a school canteen, a huge signboard 'Muslim Funeral Welfare Fund – Bagan Tiang' across the street gave me an idea. I pointed to the signboard and told my potential clients, "That is also an insurance policy. With 50 cents a month, a family would receive \$50 on the event of a death in the family. But an insurance policy will pay you \$2,000 upon death. And the premium is only \$10 per month." That seemed to arouse some interest. I continued, "You will not lose a cent of whatever premium you pay. Should you outlive the policy, you will gain not only \$2,000, but also some dividends. What difference is there between the two?"

A rather dubious community leader once asked, "Where does your business stand in the eyes of Islam?" I answered that I was not willing to be judged by those uninformed about my business but I believed any effort to foster mutual benefit among Muslims will be blessed by Allah. "Is it not better for us to leave our family with some means to carry on with their lives after our deaths?" Since that day, this person no longer questioned my profession and instead became a great friend.

Managing a Pre-Independence Malay Transport Company

Having earned some success in my insurance business, a group of Malays I knew in Batu Kurau during the Japanese Occupation approached me to help them manage an ailing Malay transport company in the Taiping-Batu Kurau area. I accepted the task, hoping to prevent one more Malay

company from going down the drain. The pay was only \$250 per month without any allowance. I travelled daily to and from Batu Kurau, where the main station was. The company had two main routes and several town service runs, twelve buses (big and small), four taxis and a petrol kiosk. It had zero cash reserves and owed money for petrol, repairs, licences, insurance, wages and cash loans to the tune of thousands. The only cash flow was its daily collections, which were pitiful.

I sat down with Company Secretary Abdul Ghaffar, a former Malay Administrative Service (MAS) Officer, to formulate a strategy. We decided to start paying off small sums to as many different creditors as possible, especially those who came with threats and abusive language. Sometimes, we purposely made small errors in writing out the cheques so we could buy a little time without affecting our credibility. As almost all petrol sold at our kiosk was on credit, and no one was paying their bills, we decided to threaten the culprits with legal action. Unfortunately the board of directors did not approve. To avoid trouble, we leased the kiosk. A member of the board of directors won the tender.

Next, we found taxi drivers had been treating company taxis as their own private cars. So, we rented the taxis to them on a monthly basis; at least now there was some regular company income. After I left the company, it returned to the old system. New Fords and Chevrolets with diesel engines were bought, but these cars were later banned from taxi service. Why didn't the company think ahead?

The third problem was that employees were not surrendering their entire collections. So, we introduced a waybill system, where tickets sold, routes taken and amounts collected were jotted down on the waybills that were later checked by a clerk. Sometimes I had to make spot-checks on the conductors, who even lent out money from the collection to friends who needed some cash. Tickets were not kept in a secure place even though they were the life of a transport company. One day, I instructed that tickets before a certain serial number were no longer valid. Soon, outsiders came to our company surrendering bundles of tickets found in the bushes, obviously thrown out by conductors who saw no use in keeping them any more.

Once, I wakened Ticket Inspector Ahmad Shah Baki from his sleep at 4.30 am, and we drove to Ijok in my car. We stopped along the route, hid ourselves in the bushes, and waited several hours for the first bus to come along. Enchik Ahmad Shah climbed onto the bus to inspect the tickets while I followed from behind in my car. We found that four tickets bearing the previous day's dates had been sold as tickets on the day after. I did not have the heart to press charges so I merely dismissed the con-

ductor. Nevertheless, the board of directors re-employed the man. To stop further fraud, I paid a stall owner at the end of the route to destroy all tickets. Since then no more collections went into the conductors' pockets.

I trained conductors to issue tickets briskly and professionally. I found that women made better conductors. They came right on time, ready to get on with the job, and were honest and industrious. Their faces expressed great alarm if there was a discrepancy in the amount collected compared to the waybill, even if it was just ten cents. To improve collections, I employed more women. I assigned a Chinese woman conductor on the Aulong route as 99 per cent of passengers there were Chinese. Malay lady conductors were assigned the Kampong Boyan and Pokok Assam routes for the same reason. A Eurasian girl handled the Kamunting route where many Australian and New Zealand soldiers were stationed at the Kamunting Camp. An Indian girl handled the Assam Kumbang route where many passengers were women and mostly Indians.

For the Taiping-Batu Kurau 20-mile distance, I placed two pretty Chinese girls because I was told many Chinese along the route were not co-operating. Furthermore, the Emergency was still on. These two Chinese girls were very effective. But how many people understood my reasons? I was just as pro-Malay as the company directors, but I was trying to save a Malay company from destruction. The buses conducted by the two Chinese girls upped collections from \$70 (just enough to run the bus) to \$180 daily. I heard Malay youths in Batu Kurau commenting, "Why take the illegal taxi; it's better to take the bus with the Chinese lady."

Those who opposed my recruiting women conductors often invoked religious implications, but actually had vested interests in the taxi business, which was being adversely affected by our bus services. However, as with other employees, most conductors were Malays and men. Non-Malays only made up 10 per cent of total employees. The two Chinese girls were no longer seen after I resigned. In fact all woman conductors were dismissed. But years later, they were eventually re-employed. Now, there are more and more women conductors in transport companies and I am glad I was one of the earliest to employ women conductors.

Board of Directors Meeting

Abdul Ghaffar and I loathed attending these long-winded monthly meetings where older men, more suited to holding roles as religious leaders and village headmen, were trying to lead a business they knew nothing about. There was one director who also worked as a bus conductor. Just imagine my position as a manager! In daily affairs I was

their manager but at these monthly meetings, I had to take instructions from this ticket conductor-cum-company director.

Without fail, at every meeting, we were told to dismiss women conductors, whose employment by us they claimed was un-Islamic. I argued that at a time when we were beginning to employ women bus conductors, Egypt was already employing women in their aircraft industry. The elderly directors retorted, "That is in Egypt. We are not Egypt." I quoted figures showing improved collections after employing women conductors, but they refused to understand.

Finally, as a last effort to prove my point that women should be employed as conductors, I hired a young lady closely related to a respected religious figure. It was only then that they stopped bringing up the issue. I could then concentrate on other matters. Although recruitment was my responsibility, I was often forced to accept youths who could not even count. These were some of the frustrations I faced, along with a few other directors.

To reduce expenses, we trimmed the directors' allowances, which naturally enraged them. Another problem loomed ahead; the company had taken a huge loan from several rich Malays to buy two buses on a profit-sharing basis. It turned out that this loan could amount to six times more than a loan bearing government-approved bank interest. Failing to clear this debt would mean a possible loss of control over the two buses. Once this debt was cleared and we felt the company was no longer sinking, Abdul Ghaffar and I formulated a seven-year plan to replace old buses with new ones, consisting of just one or two models, to simplify repairs and maintenance.

Ticket Inspectors

Some ticket inspectors were senior citizens who wore sarongs, unsuitable for a profession that demanded clambering up and down buses, sometimes while the bus was still moving. I noticed that some of them merely rode in buses and signed waybills without actually tallying the numbers. I understood that they were senior citizens but work was work and they needed to do what was necessary.

After observing how a young ticket inspector of a thriving bus company hid in the bushes to carry out spot checks, I persuaded him to join our company. I then arranged for him to run a training course for all our ticket inspectors. When I discovered that company directors and their extended families were travelling free of charge, I withdrew this privilege, knowing full well that I would be more unpopular. I told them, "In efforts

to refurbish an old house, there are sure to be some pillars or beams that need replacement.” To help an old ticket inspector, I created an unessential station master position for him in Batu Kurau, so he did not have to climb up and down buses full of women and children. So, he was the Batu Kurau station manager, the Batu Kurau Mosque *imam* (prayer leader) and a *bomoh* (shaman) all rolled into one. But he was not gracious or thankful for the favour.

Measures taken seemed to improve collections tremendously, but I began to ponder, what use was it to work myself to the bone when instead of appreciation, I was receiving brickbats? Two staff members on my side were Taiping bus stationmaster Zakaria and chief driver Harun. Zakaria handled schedules and Harun maintained and prepared buses for inspection by the Transport Office. I was grooming them to take on bigger responsibilities upon my resignation. But as soon as I left, they were demoted, and only reinstated much later.

The employees were not to be blamed for the complete lack of discipline in the company. Conductors were not equipped with pouches. Their pockets stored coins, combs, tickets, some medicated oil and everything else that would fit! I bought cloth pouches and demanded they be used or the conductors penalised. Only then did the conductors look a little smarter, more like those of the better-organised bus companies. Moving the Company's office to Taiping, where it still stands (1976), was my personal victory. It facilitated faster repairs, maintenance, supervision and administration. Furthermore the Taiping station was near a bank in which daily collections could be deposited.

After some lobbying, the company gained a new route to Aulong New Village with a small plot of land as its station, provided by the District Officer. I kept working on either getting new routes or expanding present ones. With the help of a Chinese-speaking Sikh youth, Katar Singh, I managed to get hundreds of signatures of Simpang Empat New Village dwellers asking for a bus service. Thus we gained another route. In negotiations with two other bus companies already plying part of the route, the Red and Yellow Bus Company Director Mr Pascall did not mind our taking on a small distance. The Blue Bus Company Director agreed, on condition we let them have one Taiping-Port Weld run daily.

Finally, I had to meet the Transport Office Chief, a white man, whom I drove in my small car to show the route. He approved it saying that he hoped this Malay company would prosper under my management. He added that he was willing to give every assistance to a Malay company. An order was issued that every bus company in Taiping had to build a permanent building. Many companies were already in the midst of con-

struction. What about us? I spoke with the Company Secretary and decided to focus all our attention on the building. A Malay contractor I knew well agreed to start immediately.

As it happened, much fanfare was generated over the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Crowds of people surged into Taiping. I increased the number of buses and employed more bus inspectors. We made huge collections. As our station building was completed at about the same time, the contractor was paid with not less than half a sack of coins. It was very heavy indeed!

Farewell

I gave everything I had to the company. I was up at 7.00 am at the bus station because many employees were not coming on time. I often had to conduct spot-checks. I did not leave the station until the last bus was parked at midnight. Sometimes I had to drive the mechanic to spots where the buses broke down, travel to buy spare parts in Ipoh or Penang, sometimes buying parts from the junkyard and entertain Transport Office Inspectors. A hundred and one things had to be done to revive a sick company.

After eleven months, when the bus company was back on its feet, I resigned. Now that it was plain sailing, many were interested in running the show. Furthermore, my finances had slipped so badly that I had to move into a small run-down house.¹ The sum of \$250 was hardly enough for a manager who had to spend money on lunches outside the office and pay for petrol to run around. The board of directors disliked me for refusing to haul the previous manager to court. How could I when the man had not committed any crime? Meanwhile, the insurance company manager was persuading me to return to full-time insurance underwriting.

I left a neat filing system, account books put in order, some cash assets and a bunch of disciplined workers. I had left a proper work system and the hope that the company would progress. I now notice that many women conductors, some English-educated, are being employed by the company. I finally had the last word.²

Back to Insurance Underwriting

The general manager of the American International Assurance Co. Ltd (AIA) in Ipoh was so pleased with my decision to return to insurance underwriting that he personally drove me to an insurance convention in Singapore. At its opening ceremony, I was introduced to major names in

the AIA. One joked, "Did you come by bus? Do you know how much you have already lost?" I thought the joke was in bad taste. Among the hundreds of conventioners were two Americans, two Indians, a sea of Chinese, and myself. When it dawned on them that I was the only Malay, the American AIA manager said, "Since Enchik Mustapha is the only Malay present today, Enchik Mustapha is the best Malay in Malaya." The conventioners applauded.

A successful Chinese agent, who had sold policies worth millions to tycoons, spoke. He had also been the Million Dollar Club president for several years, having made the highest annual sales. I told myself, "This is not surprising; the Chinese are the wealthy ones in this country. It is easy for any of these tycoons to buy a \$100,000 policy. If I were to claim there is no Malay rich enough to buy that big a policy, the company manager would probably say, 'Get Chinese clients to buy from you.'"

No Malay then could buy a \$100,000 policy. To gain that, I would have to convince thirty Malays to each buy between \$3,000 and \$5,000. Just imagine, just looking for these thirty clients, a Malay agent would have to talk to at least a hundred people. Since Malays lived in rural areas, just imagine how far a Malay agent would have to travel in a car and on foot to meet the hundred people. Would you believe that between 1953 and 1973 I had travelled almost as far as an astronaut – to the moon and back. I had covered an unbelievable 480,000 miles in eight cars. That was my sacrifice as a father, to raise and educate my nine children.

The biggest problem for a Malay agent is to get the first premium. As Malays were mostly employees, they had no money lying around the house. This meant having to call on them again at the end of the month, which in turn called for additional travel, petrol, food, drinks, cigarettes, treating, and sometimes an overnight stay at a hotel. After studying the Malay community and their lifestyle, I decided to introduce AIA's Salary Savings Plan, a scheme to encourage employees to save through insurance. I felt that this plan was well tailored for Malays who earned small but regular incomes. After much lobbying, the secretary of the Malay Teachers Loan and Savings Co-operative Society in Taiping agreed that members could pay their insurance premium through the society, provided the society got two per cent of the commission.

So started my Salary Savings Plan insurance scheme, consisting of just ten people. The number of insurers and the number of societies grew steadily. As they were group projects, I had to facilitate all accident, medical and death claims as speedily as possible to avoid any rumblings of dissatisfaction. I established schemes in Kuala Kangsar, Teluk Intan, Taiping and Ipoh in Perak before moving to Kuala Lipis in Pahang, to

Seremban, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. I travelled daily to co-operatives near home, in Ipoh, Kuala Kangsar and Teluk Intan. On weekends, I tackled out-of-state clients and stayed two or three nights away each time.

I was progressing without any competition for almost fifteen years until the early seventies, when the Malaysian Co-operative Insurance Society Ltd (MCIS) introduced a similar scheme, the Salary Deduction Scheme (SDS), which allowed teachers and government employees to make simple salary deductions directly through their headmasters or department chiefs. My business suffered seriously. It goes without saying that my family and I suffered a great deal from this new blow. Now (1976), I am still earning a livelihood underwriting insurance, but very little compared to those days and I am already in my late sixties.

But I am thankful to God that despite the many hurdles faced in introducing insurance to the Malays, I was a 'top ten' agent at least ten times and have attended conventions in Singapore, Bangkok, and Hong Kong. I have won several silver plaques. Seven 'Million Dollar Club Member' gold medals I received were made into pendants for my daughters. I also have hundreds of certificates, and am proud to have been a Malay pioneer in the insurance industry.

One of the fulfilling aspects of my job was helping widows and orphans begin a new life. In those years, the economic standing of the Malays was deplorable. Almost no one had any savings. So the insurance money I handed over was about their only life savings, to help the family lead a new life without their departed loved ones. My advice to new agents is: be honest and sincere, helping those in trouble is something every religion encourages. In my efforts to look for potential clients and to hand over cheques to orphans and widows, I have gone into almost every corner of every Malay village, big and small, where I have been exposed to acute poverty and suffering. At that time, an acute awareness of Malay economic deprivation seared my heart.

Notes

1. *Translator's note:* This house had a dirt kitchen floor. When it rained, water poured in not only through the roof but also through the walls, which had to be patched with plastic sheets. It was always cold at night. Rain often fell on our blankets as we slept wherever we could in the tiny house with just one bedroom. There were twelve of us. Yet this house held good memories for me. It was just outside the Kampung Jana Malay School. Everyday, I would hang on to the school fence wishing to join the schoolchildren. As a result, I was sent to school at the tender age of five.
2. I have been fighting for women's equal employment rights since 1953, and now, in 1976, I am pleased that things are going better for the women of Malaysia.

UMNO Again (Taiping, June 1954): Independence in the Air

In June 1954, after the British rejected a proposal that the Federal Legislative Council consist of sixty members elected by the people and forty appointed by the government, the Alliance made up of UMNO (United Malay National Organisation) and MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) decided to boycott all Legislative Council meetings. To me, this non-cooperation was similar to that in Indonesia, Burma and India before World War II. I believed it was time for all the people in Malaya, regardless of political leaning and ethnicity, to galvanise their energy to support the Alliance in its boycott. This conclusion was based on my own deductions and those of former MNP friends in and around Taiping, and made at a time when many former MNP colleagues were still in British detention while others had already indirectly supported Datuk Onn's new party, the Independent Malaya Party (IMP).

Furthermore, I felt no power, however formidable, could delay the fierce gales demanding *Merdeka* that were then blowing in Malaya. I was of the opinion, "If the left-wing faction is not able to bring Independence from the White Hall in England to Kuala Lumpur, let the right-wing faction fulfil it." It was not important who gained it, whether the left or the right. Let the fresh breeze of Independence first wash over our motherland. Afterward, if the left-wing was unhappy with the right-wing government, it could always take over the helm in Kuala Lumpur.

Convinced that the people of Malaya were now ready to reclaim their political rights, I discarded my left-wing ideologies momentarily. I became active in UMNO as a signal to other left-wingers to also do so. But instead, it brought about a grievous misunderstanding with my friends, who accused me of defection. They could not fathom my underlying motives. The UMNO-MCA Alliance boycott brought mixed reactions; some were sympathetic while others were not. Some senior British officers claimed this action was being highly irresponsible. The Alliance later contacted

the Malay Rulers except for the Sultan of Perak who did not want to accept the Alliance delegation.

In early 1954, an agreement was reached between the British and the Alliance. At the end of that same year, in the general elections, the Alliance won State Legislative Council seats in Terengganu and Johore by defeating Datuk Onn's party. Then the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) joined the Alliance. It was in relation to this incident that Datuk Onn cracked a sarcastic joke, "MIC means 'May I come?'"

I spent much time and energy at the newly established UMNO in Taiping. The mainstays of UMNO then were Tuan Syed Jaafar Albar, Chik Khatijah Sidik, and some other locals. The house of my cousin Mokhtar bin Haji Abdul Manaf in Assam Kumbang, Taiping, was where UMNO members rested, ate and slept. Later, UMNO President Tunku Abdul Rahman Putera arrived and his main concern seemed to be the Hale Street UMNO in Ipoh, led by Datuk Panglima Bukit Gantang.

In our meeting with the Tunku, we enquired if he was going to demand full independence from the British or just self-government. To our delight, the Tunku confirmed that UMNO was going all out for full independence. I promised the Tunku to do my share to displace the British from our homeland and I would campaign all over Perak. In view of the fact that many political leaders had sought me on the same issue, I said, "Leave Perak state to me and Mokhtar." After lunch, Tunku took out his wallet that contained a \$15 cash cheque. I joked, "Do not worry Tunku, the people will not forget!"

Taiping Town Council Elections

After the Alliance's meeting with the British government, a Taiping Town Council election was held to include Kemunting (now Kamunting), Kampung Boyan, Kampung Jana, Pokok Assam and Green House Area. Before UMNO had its own house in Taiping, my insurance agency was used by the Alliance to participate in the Town Council Elections. It was filled to bursting with banners, pamphlets and posters. I was coaxed by Taiping's former MNP members into contesting for a seat, and won.

On the closing night of the elections, I was elected as the Principal Speaker at a ceremony held at the crowded Taiping bus station. Most of the audience that night was Chinese, mostly young men. So, I decided to include historical facts on the existence of Malay-Chinese friendship since the days of the Melaka Sultanate when a Chinese Emperor had presented the Melaka Sultan with a Chinese Princess to be his wife. The goodwill and friendship enjoyed were based on respect for each other.

Should the two races get together in a close friendship and association – the British colonialists will be driven out in no time. I received much applause for that.

I then turned to the Chinese youths, “Do not vote for NAP, the National Association of Perak, because NAP is just a small body, like a tiny rowing boat that is only sturdy enough to cross a drain. Choose the Alliance because it is a large steam-ship (the Alliance symbol was a sailboat) capable of crossing the Atlantic and the Pacific to counter the colonial powers. What can the NAP party do except ‘nap’!” MCA member Ong Kah Hui used a rooster as his symbol, while mine was a flower. So, many Chinese knew me as ‘*hua*’ (flower).

Taiping Town Council

The Taiping Town Council met once a month but we usually held a pre-council meeting during the night to enable working members to carry on with their livelihoods. No one was paid a salary or allowance. Meanwhile, I was getting disillusioned with the Alliance and Town Council politics; certain groups and areas were given priority over others, just as in the colonial era.

Two matters kept cropping up. One was the Taiping Malay Bazaar, which occupied a former collecting centre for Taiping Sanitary Board night-soil pails. It was now a bazaar where Malay families opened *songkok* shops, bookshops, barbershops and other small businesses. Yet this bazaar was the target of attacks by members who wanted to convert it into a row of shop houses. Some syndicate could be behind the Town Council Chairman. We, the Malay councillors did our best to keep the bazaar.

The second issue concerned the Pekan Rabu, another small business spot located between two buildings in Jalan Kota, Taiping. It was often mentioned as a possible car park. Yet, this was the only other place in Taiping where Malay businessmen could make some money running small eating shops as it stood near government offices and a cinema. After I left the Town Council, the Pekan Rabu was moved to a remote part of Taiping, and after some propaganda defaming the businessmen there, it was closed down. It is now a bus station. That was the fate of the Taiping Malays – ‘being chased from pillar to post’.

To Be or Not To Be – A Candidate?

I thought of resigning from UMNO and the Town Council, but a Chinese friend, influential in the MCA, advised me to be patient as the first

national general elections were just around the corner. That would be my golden opportunity, he said. For the general elections, he continued, the MCA was looking for a candidate for the Federal Parliamentary Elections, while UMNO would place a candidate for the State Legislative Assembly Elections. Since both this Chinese friend and the MCA wanted me to be the State candidate, my friend advised me to become more politically active in order to successfully take over the Larut and Matang UMNO Chairman's position from the incumbent.

This MCA Liaison Officer added that if I were to lead the Larut and Matang UMNO, the biggest in the state of Perak, I would be Chairman of the Larut and Matang Alliance. I would naturally also become Chairman of UMNO, MCA and MIC for all of Perak. When the time came to implement a cabinet system in Perak, he said, I would of course gain the most powerful state post, that of Chief Minister, or *Menteri Besar*. Huge pay, a huge allowance, a huge house and huge power to match, would be mine. He concluded, "You will be the most powerful man in Perak."

After showing me a book that illustrated seven ways of making money in a new and independent state, he told me to think about it and give my answer on his next visit. This MCA Liaison Officer dropped in a few days later to continue with the conversation, which centred on our mutual benefit. But I realised that if I were to be crowned by this man, I would be his stooge forever. So, I asked, "You are an MCA member. How can MCA decide on the UMNO candidate?" He replied, "Che Mustapha, you must not forget; who bore all the election expenses in the Taiping elections and in other places like Terengganu and Johore? Everything was borne by the MCA!" I saw some truth in his claim.

I replied that I had been struggling for Independence since the age of twenty, though not for fame, power or wealth. "I only want our nation's freedom. I also want to replace the current colonial rule with a political system where the people lead a prosperous, happy and peaceful life." He responded, "Don't be stupid! I have come to offer you wealth!" I declined, "It is all right. Let me live in poverty as long as I have my peace of mind. I am afraid wealth may make me forget the poor people on their old bicycles." He got up from his seat and asked, "You do not want a million dollars a year? I am willing to give you that much. You don't even have to do anything! You just have to sit there!" He then turned to my son-in-law and said he had never met anyone as stupid as me.

All through the conversation, several things played in my mind. Had I accepted the offer, I would be an opportunist and a 'careerist politician' – as Gandhi had labelled some politicians. What would my political

teacher Sutan Jenain say, even though he was already in Jakarta? I feared money would tempt me into forgetting my original struggle – for the people, and only the people!

June 1954 – Nominated for UMNO Vice-Presidency

In mid-1954, I was nominated by Perak UMNO to become UMNO Malaya's Vice-Presidential candidate to replace Tun Dr Ismail (later Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia), who had been appointed Malaya's Ambassador to the United States of America. But my nomination was blocked by Tun Abdul Razak – he introduced a new regulation requiring that all candidates for the UMNO Supreme Council must have been members for at least five years. I only had four years. I was greatly disappointed as I was prepared to work hard to help draft independent Malaya's new Constitution.

Utusan Melayu of 27 June 1954 observed:

It must be remembered that Enchik Mustapha Hussain was UMNO Malaya Presidential candidate in 1951, but was defeated by Tunku Abdul Rahman. UMNO members are confident he is capable of carrying out his responsibilities if chosen by the people as they are still holding fast to his 1951 slogan, 'Once in politics, always in politics'.

It must be borne in mind that when the Larut and Matang UMNO fortress was down and almost taken over by the Hale Street Ipoh UMNO led by Datuk Gantang, he (Mustapha Hussain) and some friends rebuilt Larut and Matang UMNO in 1953. He contested as an Alliance candidate for the Taiping Town Council, won and completed his term of duty successfully. For the Federal Elections, he was nominated by Larut and Matang UMNO, but withdrew for health reasons. Although he withdrew, he worked tirelessly to ensure victory for Alliance candidates in the state.

1955 General Elections

Although peaceful, Larut and Matang UMNO was going through difficult times. Enchik Abdul Rahman, the local leader of the party, was suddenly made to appear unfit to lead, and replaced by someone from Lenggong. A statement in *The Straits Times* claimed that it was vital that the Larut and Matang UMNO be led by an outsider, as no one from the district seemed capable of leading the Perak State Legislative Council.

This was illogical! The King Edward VII School in Taiping afforded an education as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. The School was in the Larut and Matang district, not in Lenggong. Surely, there were many Malays from the school who were capable enough. In fact, the proposed candidate from Lenggong had attended this same school. I sent a protest

note to UMNO Malaya's Secretary General on behalf of Larut and Matang district residents. Personally, I was not interested in the post as many Alliance policies were in conflict with my political ideology. Had I been interested, I was unbeatable as I was born and bred in the district.

Secret Meeting with Datuk Onn

The last time I met Datuk Onn Jaafar was a couple of days before the all-Malaya Malay Youth Congress on 1 April 1955. Dr Burhanuddin and I met Datuk Onn secretly to discuss three matters. At the meeting, we agreed that the nation would be called '*Malaysia*'; the nationality of the people '*Melayu*'; and the monarch would be called '*Duli Yang Maha Mulia Seri Paduka Baginda Yang Di-Pertuan Agung*', now usually referred to as the Agung or King.

Only the second issue of '*Melayu*' nationality did not materialise. No one knew of this meeting, held at a Holland Road coffee shop by the river that flows through the heart of Kuala Lumpur.

Rakyat Press (1957): Print Capitalism

Rakyat Trading Co. Ltd – or the People’s Trading Co. Ltd – was a left-wing Malay business concern located at No. 29, Jalan Hale, Ipoh. It had humble beginnings in 1946 when a group of left-wing Malay nationalists bought over a press from Raja Abdullah, an Ipoh Malay businessman. At one time, the company published a Malay paper called *Warta Kinta*. Its shareholders were mostly Malay teachers, small businessmen, writers and a few better-off Malays. All were nationalists who believed in the ‘struggle by the people and for the people’.

According to Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman, who contributed a lot of energy and time to the company, the founding members and directors included Arshad Ashaari from Bidor, Haji Yahaya from Teluk Intan, Abdul Rahman Rahim from Ipoh, and several Malay businessmen from Sitiawan, Bagan Datuk, Kuala Kangsar and Padang Rengas. They were then followed by Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir, Pak Chik Ahmad and Hanif Sulaiman from North Perak. The name Rakyat Trading Co. Ltd. was chosen by none other than Ishak Haji Muhammad.

I played a role, not only in keeping the company alive, but also invested much money, energy and time in the project. In fact, during its formation, my political friends and I slept on the premises, on old straw mats with our arms as pillows. But as soon as it was ready, operations were taken over by Pak Chik Ahmad.

A Meeting in My House in Kemunting – March 1957¹

At about 8.00 pm one evening in March 1957, I was visited by five Malay nationalists: Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir from Gunung Semangol, Pak Chik Ahmad from Taiping, Chikgu Yusuf bin Abdul Rahman² from Ipoh, Chikgu Basir bin Uduh from Taiping, and Chikgu Ariffin bin Ibrahim, also from Taiping. Before I could even offer them drinks, Pak Chik Ahmad blurted out the sad fate of the Rakyat Trading Co., expressing his readiness to hand over management. Monthly sales had not even

reached \$100, several months' rent was overdue, the machines were broken and wages were owed to employees, some of whom had deserted the company for other printers. I was stunned. Pak Chik Ahmad once vowed he would not part with the company except with his life. I then asked who had authorised him to manage the company. He replied, "Dr Burhanuddin, Ishak Haji Muhammad and Ustaz Abu Bakar." I felt good, hearing those names.

The other four people at the meeting, all loyal left-wing Malay politicians, then expressed their confidence that I could turn the company around, and asked me to take over. Not wanting to disappoint them, I said I would only agree if Dr Burhanuddin, Ishak, and Ustaz Abu Bakar himself would approve of this move. Ustaz Abu Bakar then explained that he represented the other two names and wanted me to take over the ailing company. I recalled the eleven months I had sacrificed, at the expense of a lucrative insurance business, to revive a Malay transport company. Was it time for me to make another sacrifice for another Malay company?

Realising the importance of a printing press to our left nationalist movement and unwilling to lose the company to a right-wing faction ready to buy over the company, I promised to consider the proposition. As usual, my nationalistic sentiments overwhelmed everything else, including logic. The company was vital to our struggle; it could be used to publish a 'people's newspaper'. A people without their own printing press would be handicapped. Therefore, I agreed to revive yet another drowning Malay company.

I felt sorry for Pak Chik Ahmad, but he was happy to have the burden off his shoulders. The five visitors left my house at midnight with a load off their chests. But it was now all mine to bear. How would this drama end? All five had also agreed to my suggestion that Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman, a former teacher, be appointed manager. Although experienced in printing, he had been unemployed since his release from British detention under the Emergency laws. I was happy to help this man who had suffered a lot because of his nationalist struggle.

Later, Chikgu Aziz Zaman, Yusuf, Basir, Ariffin, Ustaz Abu Bakar, Pak Chik Ahmad and I left for Penang to offer Chikgu Mohd Isa the position. When Chikgu Yusuf asked, "Would you be willing to return to Perak to run the Rakyat Trading Company?", he did not answer right away. Instead, he asked, "How big are the ulcers now suffered by the Company?" When asked why he had asked that question, he said, "I guess I knew the previous manager!" We answered in unison, "It is bad, but not so bad that it cannot be remedied".

We stayed in Penang for two days, at my expense, to visit several Malay printing presses such as the United Press and the Warta Negara Press, where Khalid and Jailani showed us the finer points of running a press. I then drove Chikgu Mohd Isa to his home in Parit Buntar, where I stayed overnight. The next day, we dropped in to see Ustaz Abu Bakar, the Company Chairman, who advised Chikgu Mohd Isa to go to Ipoh immediately to take over the company. At the next meeting, I bought thirty more shares for a total of fifty, which entitled me to a directorship. I was appointed Managing Director, taking over from Pak Chik Ahmad. We then decided to issue new shares to bring the total to \$50,000, a princely sum then. Old shareholders would receive seventy per cent of company profits against thirty per cent for new shareholders.

The Ailing Rakyat Trading Company

Rakyat Trading Company was located in a Jalan Hale shop-house beside Ipoh's main field, near the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and a row of shop-houses and legal offices. The Islamic Religious Department, a potential client, was also nearby. It was an ideal location.³ Unfortunately, the shop was in utter shambles. A solitary desk and rows of empty bookshelves, full of bottles of medicated oil, greeted us. In the back were old machines in need of repair and servicing, and lead-type was strewn all over the place. It was a dark and airless work place, with electric bulbs strung about with rope.

Accounts had been neglected for three years since bookkeeper Mustafa bin Abu Bakar left. While I was making an analysis of the company's decline, Syed Nordin Wafa, one of the directors, announced his refusal to assist the company anymore or to buy more shares. I then sought out an old friend, Nordin bin Tak, a left-wing nationalist, who agreed to help. Truly sorry that a Malay business concern was in such dire straits, and completely committed to my new undertaking, I took out my chequebook again, and though my own finances were not very substantial to begin with, installed a telephone and paid the overdue wages, rent, business and equipment licence fees, and accounting fees. In a frenzy, I refurbished and reorganised the shop to regain some semblance of a business enterprise.

I found the employees hardworking even though they were paid little and, invariably, late. I then managed to persuade Din, a former employee who had left to work for a non-Malay company, to return. Rakyat Trading quietly sponsored the travel of company director Haji Yahaya to Jakarta, Indonesia, to meet with Ibrahim Yaakub, now a wealthy businessman and

owner and general manager of Bank Pertiwi. Haji Yahaya carried a letter written by Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman and me, urging Ibrahim to assist Rakyat Trading Company by providing some books for sale.

We also advised Ibrahim not to send us any more of his articles and documents calling for a revolutionary government in Malaya.⁴ If the British police were to find such documents on the Rakyat Trading Company premises, our business would be closed down. I wrote, "Please do not harm our small business. You know that Chikgu Mohd Isa was only recently released from a British detention camp."

I was not surprised when Haji Yahaya came back empty-handed, just like Dr Burhanuddin, who had previously sought out Ibrahim Yaakub. Haji Yahaya also disclosed how difficult it was to meet with Ibrahim. When Haji Yahaya appealed to Ibrahim for some support in the form of money or books for Rakyat Trading Company to sustain the Malay struggle Ibrahim once believed in, he had shown Haji Yahaya the catalogue for a car he was interested in buying. It was to be his third car.

After this big slap in the face, Haji Yahaya left this Malay man, now an Indonesian citizen. I asked Haji Yahaya if he had seen a metal tortoise made of thirteen blocks (KMM's secret symbol). Haji Yahaya said he had seen it in Ibrahim's bathroom. I told myself, "If Ibrahim had the time to bring the heavy tortoise over to Indonesia when he fled after the Japanese surrendered, I am sure he was able to get away with many treasures."

Rakyat Trading Company's Progress

Sale of our new shares was poor. Ishak Haji Muhammad brought \$200, a gift from Badrillah, another nationalist in Kuala Lumpur. Chikgu Yusuf brought \$2,000, which I repaid in a month because he had borrowed it from a money-lender. My good friend, Chikgu Aziz Zaman brought \$500, but I declined, fearing it would be lost in no time. Ustad Abu Bakar tried to bring in a little. In other words, almost every one of my friends tried to help inject some funds, but it was not enough. Not many people wanted to invest in Malay companies, which were rapidly vanishing.

But out of the blue, Chikgu Mohd Isa and I managed to influence a Malay man to loan us money to buy a modern and noiseless Mercedes printing machine costing \$12,000. This brought an end to the heavy clanking sounds that the neighbours complained about when we worked at night. This kind man even bought some shares, which allowed us to buy new typesets, paper cutters and some tools. His only message, "Make sure the Rakyat Trading Company signboard in front of the shop is not taken down." So in addition to taking orders for printing cards, booklets,

programmes and pamphlets, I started selling text books and some small novels on Malay warriors and freedom fighters.⁵

While I was busy putting my shoulder to the wheel of the Rakyat Trading Company, Malaya gained Independence on 31 August 1957. I was the happiest Malay on that auspicious day. My heart almost burst with national pride.

In focusing my attention on the company, my insurance business suffered tremendously, and I earned no salary. To make up for my lost income, I sold *nasi lemak* (rice cooked in coconut milk) in front of a neighbour's shop. My two sons, Adlan and Roslan Bayu, aged six and five, helped during weekends but I still could not earn enough to support nine children. As a result, when Rakyat Trading Company was back on its feet in 1958 after eleven months under my management, I handed it over to Ustaz Abu Bakar. Daud Yatimi from Manong was now to manage the company, and I went back to my insurance business.

At my last company meeting, company chairman Ustaz Abu Bakar suggested that it be recorded that it was with my financial assistance, time and energy that Rakyat Trading Company had been saved. I was happy to have revived another Malay company under colonial rule even though I did not earn a single cent during the entire eleven months, besides losing my business. I had put in about \$20,000 in terms of shares and lost revenue, but I don't regret it. Daud Yatimi did well, especially at selling textbooks, but when the building had to be torn down for a high-rise, the company moved to Taiping with a little compensation. There, Pak Chik Ahmad took over.

Fourteen years after I left Rakyat Trading Company, Ibrahim returned to visit Malaysia in 1974. He suggested that Pak Chik Ahmad sell the company if it was too bothersome. I told Pak Chik Ahmad, "Ibrahim has no right in this matter; he did not invest a single cent in this company. However, if Pak Chik wants to sell the company, by all means, do so. But please do not forget its many shareholders." The company was sold off that year, either by an individual or by the board of directors, I am not sure. I received nothing, although I had invested much in the company.

I salute the late Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir for carrying on as chairman of the company from beginning to end. Despite the storms, he was always cool and collected. I also thank the kind soul who donated such a large sum to us to revive the company, which lived on until 1974. My thanks also go to the teachers – Chikgu Mohd Isa Sulaiman, Yusuf bin Abdul Rahman, Basir bin Uduh, Ariffin bin Ibrahim, Aziz Zaman bin Abdul Aziz, Enchik Nordin bin Tak – and others who showed concern.

Such thanks are extended to all the directors, especially Haji Yahaya from Bagan Datuk and Arshad Ashaari from Bidor, who gave their all to the company. I must not forget my friends, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Dr Burhanuddin, Ahmad Boestamam and Abdul Rahman Rahim, who helped build the company with sweat and tears, but did not witness its demise in 1974. Lastly, I should not omit the shareholders who willingly parted with what little they had.

Notes

1. *Translator's note:* I was only nine, but I remember that visit. Night had fallen and the living room where my father and his friends sat was rather dark. My mother sent me there to switch the light on, but my father jumped up from his seat to switch it off. The men then continued to talk in the dark. I thought that was rather strange.
2. *Translator's note:* Chikgu Yusuf was my Standard VI class teacher at Jalan Pasir Putih Malay School. He was a dedicated and gentle teacher who never needed a cane.
3. *Translator's note:* We lived upstairs. It was nothing much, but I was proud of it, for it was our first brick dwelling. It also afforded us a grandstand view of various events that took place in the Town Padang (Square) in front. At night, I loved to watch the string of sparrows perched wing to wing on telegraph lines strung along the street, and wondered if the same sparrow slept in the same spot every night.
4. *Translator's note:* My father's political friends visited the press downstairs at all hours. Since it was considered improper in Malay etiquette for my mother to serve male guests coffee, I always carried trays of thick black coffee to them. One afternoon, as I was setting down a tray, I saw the men (my father included) passing a small note from one to another, as if they did not know what to do with it. A man with pouting lips stood up, said "Give it to me", folded it many times over and stuck it into his shoe. He then walked out. That man I later recognised as Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako).
5. *Translator's note:* At night, after my parents had fallen asleep, I used a torchlight to slip downstairs to retrieve a book from one of the shelves. As my parents did not approve of us sleeping late, I used the torchlight to read under my blanket. In that manner, I read almost all the books that my father sold. I don't know if he ever knew of my nightly sojourns into the wonderful world of words. It was then that I dreamt of having my name on the cover of a book; now (2004) I have four books to my name.

Postscript: Why I Penned These Memoirs

On 6 June 1974, as I sat on the porch of my house in Matang, trying to catch my breath after a nasty asthmatic attack earlier that morning, a postman arrived with a stack of letters. As usual, I inspected the envelopes one by one until I noticed one stamped Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) or UKM for short. I put it aside and fiddled with the rest. This habit of determining who my mail was from before opening the envelopes was a habit I had recently acquired. It must be a habit associated with old age.

The UKM-stamped letter was from Prof. Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, Head of UKM's History Department. I had seen Prof. Zainal Abidin on television, heard him on radio and read his articles in the local press. In his letter, he said that his office was about to conduct a course on 'Prominent Figures' in the 1974/75 session for its honour students. This course aimed at collecting experiences of prominent Malaysians 'no longer active in their fields' to serve as a basis for writing their biographies, and I was one of those selected. After reading the letter, I felt inspired, recalling several newspaper clippings on others' experiences.

If I agreed to the project, I was required to write a working paper for an hour-long presentation and this would be followed by a one-hour question-and-answer session. Should I need more time, I could have two-hour sessions on two different occasions. The working paper was needed two weeks ahead of time. The letter hoped "you will respond positively as we fear details of your experiences may not be recorded for our future generations. It would mean a great loss to the nation and our national history will not be complete."

The language of the letter was refined and referred to me as a prominent figure, but I was not prepared to accept the invitation unless UKM retracted the phrase "no longer active". 'Active', 'not active' or 'no longer active' are relative terms. No one should judge anyone by the number of public speeches they deliver per month, the size of the stages they stand on, the loudness of the amplifier or the size of the audience. What is

important is a person's effectiveness. Someone can leave his mark merely by whispering into the ears of his listeners, one after another. One listener becomes two, two becomes four, and so on – to become tens, hundreds and thousands. So, can one judge if someone is no longer active with just the naked eye? Only time can tell.

I was, however, not inclined to disappoint Prof. Zainal Abidin and his Fourth Year history students. After some discussions with my wife, I decided to meet with the professor to discuss several issues before accepting the invitation. I wanted to discuss the part about being 'no longer active', and pre-record my presentation because of my unpredictable bouts of asthma attacks. I also wanted more time, to see the place and the audience, and to know if the seeds I would sow would be beneficial to the students. Stocked with my asthma medication, pills and the inhaler, a friend drove me to Kuala Lumpur.

During the six-hour drive (younger travellers would probably have done it in four), many thoughts came to my mind. At long last information and secrets I had kept buried in my chest for over thirty years would be out in the open. This was God's will. This was good. My grandchildren would know that my struggle for national freedom was true and right. This was a struggle from the heart of a nationalist aspiring for national independence and sovereignty. Would my talk have negative effects? What I would present would be the truth, but it would contradict claims made by another 'prominent figure'.¹ All his claims had been accepted as truth and chronicled in full, without detailed research to verify them. In fact, many of his claims were self-serving concoctions, not facts.²

In my first face-to-face meeting with Prof. Zainal Abidin, I found him to be rather tall for a Malay, fair-skinned, gentle and extremely polite not only to me, but also to the students and his faculty colleagues. I was impressed; in the past, I had been in touch with his brother, Tan Sri Haji Ainuddin bin Abdul Wahid, the Vice Chancellor of Malaysia's University of Technology.

Following a brief introduction, we moved to the issues at hand. After some discussion between us, the phrase 'no longer active' was withdrawn. It was also agreed that I could pre-record my delivery. Perhaps it was the Professor's smart shirt, the traditional Malay *baju teluk belanga*, that made me accept his invitation. I also saw students wearing traditional Malay sandals and walking in groups of the same gender. Clearly, Malay etiquette was observed here. I agreed to speak on 23 July, even though it was only eighteen days away. The truth was that all the material was already in my head. It had been stored there for over thirty years! It was just a matter of pulling out the pages and chapters from my mind and

putting them on tape. I then started working on my presentation in between my asthma attacks.

Seminar at UKM, 23 July 1974

I arrived as scheduled, and was met by Prof. Zainal Abidin and an Australian lecturer, John Funston, who liked to use the word *terpesona*, or ‘fascinating’. I was taken to a lecture hall where students were anxiously waiting for me – an old man who had kept silent for so long.

It was now time to lift the veil and reveal the folds of history. I was already 64 years old and might not have another chance to share my memories. To me, the history of the Malays should not be manipulated, for it is the people’s life-blood. To begin, I announced that I had not been in front of a class since 1941 and had lost touch with teaching. Actually, for someone who had been lecturing (in class and at political meetings) for umpteen years, the audience size was no problem, the larger the better. Explaining my asthma problem, I asked for permission to play the tape. I would entertain questions at any time while the tape was being played.

My friend Enchik Shaari sat with me as the tape was played. This went on for two hours until 1.00 pm, with several pauses in between for questions. UKM taped my presentation while Abdul Malek bin Hanafiah,³ son of a former Perak KMM member, taped it on his recorder. We lunched in a restaurant where the food was not as good as where Prof. Zainal Abidin had taken me on my first visit.

At 2.00 pm, the tape was continued. Not one student left his or her seat. No one went out to light a cigarette. Almost every student was crying. Some with tears running down their cheeks, while others sobbed. I cried along with them as memories of my bitter and gruelling experiences came flooding back – being a Malay Fifth Column leader during World War II; detained in several police lock-ups and prisons; taunted and jeered by Malays who saw me hawking food on the roadside; humiliated by people who slammed their doors in my face; asked to leave my rented cubicle in the middle of the night, and being labelled as the Malay who had ‘brought’ the Japanese into Malaya.

A friend who used to call me ‘Brother’ was now living in luxury as a Jakarta bank owner. I remembered how our hands were tightly clasped as we vowed “One for all; all for one” in front of the holy Qur’an after the British Surrender. But at the end of the Japanese Occupation, he had fled with two bundles of Japanese and British currency, and much more. And later, during the Emergency some time in 1948 or 1949, this same friend had requested that I set up a ‘Third Force’ promising to send me

some *benzin* (petrol, meaning money). Had I obeyed his instructions, I would have been detained yet again by the British. My family would have suffered once again. Enough is enough, Ibrahim!

I was jolted from my reminiscences by the sound of a student's sobs. The tape went on. At 4.00 pm, Prof. Zainal Abidin reminded the audience it was time for tea, but they refused to budge. The tape ran till 6.00 pm when towards the close I stated, "This is history. I have told you everything that happened in all sincerity. Let future generations make their judgement." The question and answer session was cut short by the Professor, who reminded the students that I was old, feeble and would need to rest. For a man of my age in such feeble health, taping five hours for delivery within eighteen days was truly an achievement. I was also told that I had broken all records as not one student had left his or her seat. At their insistence, the seminar had lasted seven hours.

The Professor sobbed for about five minutes, watched by Shaari and me. It was only after he had regained his composure that he ended his thank you speech. I left them with a tremendous sense of mental and emotional fulfilment. I had sown in these educated young souls the urge to struggle for justice. I went back with great pride. I had been addressed as *bapa* (father or a respected older man). This was very special to me, a Malay nationalist who had missed being thus addressed since the death of President Soekarno.

Notes

1. Ibrahim Yaakub @ IBHY @ Drs Iskandar Kamel @ I.K. Agastya.
2. Historian W.R. Roff, who conducted many interviews with Ibrahim, commented, "Ibrahim's own tendency to inflate KMM makes objective description difficult to obtain."
3. He became a Political Secretary to the Prime Minister and a member of the Perak state executive council.

Appendix 1

Signed Statement by Haji Ahmad bin Haji Mohammad Amin

HAJI AHMAD BIN HAJI MOHAMMAD AMIN
K.M.N., B. Sc. (Agric., Edin.) Dip. Agric.
4, JALAN 4L, AMPANG JAYA,
68000 AMPANG, SELANGOR D.E.

To Whom It May Concern

There is one important fact that is missing in several articles and books that I have read on Ibrahim Yaakub. The fact is that Ibrahim Yaakub received gold bullion bars from the Japanese authorities, even before the Japanese landed in Malaya. The Japanese gave the gold to him to carry out intelligence work for the Japanese (Fujiwara Kikan To Kikan Kosako In – Fujiwara Kikan Intelligence Unit) as instructed by them.

Afraid that the British authorities might discover the gold, Ibrahim Yaakub asked Pak Chik Ahmad, a KMM member very close to him, to hide them. Pak Chik Ahmad was married to my cousin, Wan Tam binti Ibrahim.

Since Pak Chik Ahmad was afraid that someone might break into his wooden house and cart away the gold bars, he buried them in a flowerpot, on top of which he placed some soil, and planted balsam flowers. He then placed the flowerpot on a platform outside his house at No. 126, Jalan Stephens in Taiping. At the end of 1942, Pak Chik Ahmad returned the gold bars to Ibrahim Yaakub.

I dare make this statement because I personally heard the story from Pak Chik Ahmad. I even saw the emptied flowerpot on the 23rd of January 1943, the day I visited Pak Chik Ahmad, three days after my marriage. I make this statement for the sake of history.

.....
Haji Ahmad bin Mohammad Amin
Date: 23 December 2003

Appendix 2

English Translation of Signed Letter by Raja Dato' Sri Ahmed Hisham bin Raja Abdul Malik

Crest
Office of the Malay Territorial Chief
Perak South
11th November 1975

Enchik Mustapha Hussain
No. 11, Jalan Menteri
Matang, Perak
Enchik Mustapha,

My Blood Curdling Experience

I am to advise you that your letter dated 6th November had been received by me and I understand its content. I thank you for it.

In fact, at the command of my uncle, the late Sultan Abdul Aziz, then Sultan of Perak, I have put the incident out of my mind.

Had I not acquiesced to the command, many undesirable events would have happened. The British Government and Military might have taken certain actions after they had re-occupied the country in 1945.

However, I have personally made a thorough study and investigation on the incident. I can state most clearly that you, Enchik Mustapha Hussain, had not caused me much distress. In fact, you had done your utmost to calm my mind. You also cared for my personal safety and even extended it to my wife and children who were then residing in a government quarters along Circular Road (Jalan Tun Razak), Kuala Lumpur.

So much for the present.
Best Wishes from:

With all sincerity,
Signed

Raja (Dato' Sri) Ahmed Hisham, SPMP, JP, PJK
Raja Kechil Sulong Perak

Appendix 3

English Translation of Signed Statement by Jalaluddin Abu Bakar, Former CID Officer, Malaya

Record of Events

When World War II broke out in Malaya and the Japanese came into power, I was arrested by the Japanese Army through the collaboration of Onan Haji Siraj. My superior officer, Raja Ahmed Hisham, the most senior Malay Police Officer prior to the War and I were detained in a room that was guarded by Japanese soldiers and KMM members.

While Raja Ahmed Hisham and I were in custody together, Onan Haji Siraj threatened me consistently. He said that I would be killed as soon as the British were defeated, especially after Singapore had fallen into Japanese hands. I cannot describe how Onan's mental torture had affected my heart and mind.

I am much indebted and grateful to Enchik Mustapha Hussain who sincerely helped us when we were in the Japanese custody. It was through his intercession with the Japanese that Raja Ahmed Hisham and I escaped a brutal fate; in other words Enchik Mustapha saved us from being beheaded or killed by the Japanese.

I still remember how he and I travelled to Serdang and Ulu Langat to look for food. He also allowed me a few hours of freedom to render help to Raja Ahmed Hisham's family.

With the personal guarantee of kind M.N. Othman, then KMM Secretary for Selangor, I returned to my village in Temoh to see my family. Upon my return to Kuala Lumpur, I found that Enchik Mustapha Hussain had already freed Raja Ahmed Hisham.

After World War II was over, I wrote a statement (to the British authorities) about active KMM members, particularly about Enchik Mustapha Hussain, explaining the true facts of what had happened to Raja Ahmed Hisham and I. Among other things, I mentioned about Enchik Mustapha's invaluable assistance, and good deeds, to Raja Ahmad Hisham and I during the Japanese Occupation.

This is a true statement of facts that I remember vividly.

Signed.....
Jalaluddin Abu Bakar
Ex-CID, Malaya

Afterword – Cries of a Tormented Soul

Cheah Boon Kheng

Mustapha Hussain's memoirs present an interesting insight into a sharp, sensitive mind who turned to ethno-nationalism and later struggled for moral integrity, justice and recognition.

Perak-born Mustapha, a cousin of the first President of Singapore, Tun Yusof Ishak, was an armchair, pipe-smoking, left-wing intellectual who taught at the Serdang Agricultural School before the war, but who fell on hard times.

He loved to ride a fast motorcycle. He was an avid reader and a member of the (British) Left Book Club. He might have gone through life as a happy-go-lucky fellow if he had not been discriminated against in the colonial civil service by white Europeans.

Life for him would have remained idyllic, being almost the equal of an Englishman – teaching, reading and doing research, and 'dressing and behaving like a white man' on paydays. But racial discrimination made him a bitter diehard Malay nationalist, an anger that consumed his soul.

Mustapha owed his English education to his father, a land surveyor. His socialism he attributed to a few European teachers and to books by Gandhi, Nehru, Edgar Snow and other left-wing writers.

In 1934, he married Mariah binti Haji Abdul Hamid (formerly Dorothy Ida Fenner). She was only 14, he 24. Once the children came, he was anxious to further his (academic) career, but the lack of job promotions unsettled him.

He joined other young disillusioned Malay college graduates like Ishak Haji Muhammad and Ibrahim Yaakub, all angry young men like himself imbued with nationalist ideals. They formed the Young Malay Union (Kesatuan Melayu Muda) in 1938, with Mustapha as the group's vice president.

"KMM was founded by a group of radical left nationalists in their twenties. Influenced by world history in general, and political events in Turkey in particular, they desired a political body similar to the Young Turks," he recalls. "One bone of contention was (the) British policy of allowing tens of thousands of 'others' into Malaya."

But Mustapha little realised what trouble KMM membership would get him into, for without consulting him or the group's other leaders, its president, Ibrahim Yaakub, had contacted the Japanese through their Consul-General in Singapore, Ken Tsurumi. For large sums of money, Ibrahim committed KMM members to serve as espionage agents and guides to assist a Japanese army invading Malaya.

The Japanese Army attacked Kota Bharu in December 1941. British military intelligence belatedly intercepted a Japanese radio broadcast announcing that KAME (meaning 'tortoise' in Japanese), a Malay fifth column organisation, would assist the invading army.

The name sounded too similar to the KMM's. Without wasting any time, the British police rounded up over 100 KMM leaders and members in all parts of the country, including Ibrahim Yaakub and Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako), who were detained and sent to Changi Jail in Singapore.

Mustapha, however, was in the Kuala Lumpur Hospital for treatment of a nervous disorder. Unaware that there was a warrant of arrest for him, he had discharged himself, gone back to the Agricultural School to collect his belongings, and left with his family to recuperate at his father's village in Matang, Perak. Three days later, the war would begin.

After the fall of Taiping, Japanese troops, accompanied by KMM members, entered his village looking for him. They asked him to come with them. "I was 'invited' to attend a crucial meeting in Taiping, after which I would be sent back to Matang (but this turned out to be false)," says Mustapha.

How could I say no? I remember a Malay adage: *jika tiada senapang, lebih baik beri jalan lapang*, or 'if one has no guns, it is best to give way'. I tried to explain my legs were weak from a nervous disorder but a Japanese officer snapped, "Never mind! Four Japanese soldiers can carry you on a chair!"

Thus, Mustapha's forced collaboration with the Japanese began. Once he realised that he had no alternative, he began to co-operate. He used his influence with the Japanese to help family, friends, and any Malay in trouble, including captured Malay soldiers who had fought on the British side. This was what he did all along the way down to Singapore where the Japanese troops took him.

Mustapha's candid memoirs confirm why memory of the war in multi-racial Malaya is so ethnically divisive and sensitive. Recalling Malay wartime roles and experiences tries to play down what he calls 'collaboration', conscious of the Japanese atrocities and massacres of the Chinese community or the role of anti-Japanese Chinese guerrillas.

Even before his death in 1987, his memories had been badly scarred by his deep sense of anguish, disillusionment, shame and betrayal brought on by the nightmare of ‘collaboration’.

With no reconciliation between himself and Ibrahim Yaakub when the latter returned to Malaysia for a brief visit before his death in Jakarta in 1979, Mustapha did not forget or forgive the ‘wrongs’ done to him and others.

Mustapha, Ishak Haji Muhammad and others accused Ibrahim of not only abdicating his leadership and abandoning his supporters, but also of betraying their struggle in Indonesia for his own self-interest. In Mustapha’s memoirs, Ibrahim appears as a Machiavellian manipulator, a grasping, corrupt, self-seeking, egocentric personality.

In exile in Indonesia, Ibrahim became a supporter of President Soekarno, got involved in Indonesian politics, and later amassed a great fortune as a banker. When he died in 1979, he was honoured by Indonesia with burial in the Heroes’ Cemetery in Kalibata.

During the period of Indonesia’s *konfrontasi* (confrontation) against Malaysia, the UMNO newspaper *Malaya Merdeka*, of March 1963, described Ibrahim as a “Malay coward and traitor who managed to fool many Indonesian leaders.”

Ibrahim’s getaway to Indonesia has been a source of delightful gossip and controversy. According to a veteran Malay nationalist, Pak Chik Ahmad, Ibrahim took with him several gold bars. These were given to him by the Japanese, which Pak Chik Ahmad had hidden for him in flower pots, and which were later handed over to him in Singapore before his getaway.

Unlike Ibrahim, who escaped to Indonesia, Mustapha was arrested and detained twice by the British authorities on charges of collaboration with the Japanese. He was only released after petitions were made to the British authorities by former members of the Malay Regiment, whose lives he had saved from the Japanese.

Because of the trauma he went through at the end of the war, Mustapha suffered a nervous breakdown. He endured poverty and ostracism. He was not re-employed into the civil service. To fend for himself and his family, he worked as a farmer, a fruit seller, a noodles hawker, a printer and an insurance agent.

His struggles to defend himself and clear his name engaged much of the rest of his life. Before his death, he was conferred a state award by the Sultan of Perak, and, due to the intervention of a former Federal Minister, received some monetary compensation in lieu of his pension from the Government.

A heavy tinge of bitterness, therefore, colours much of Mustapha's memoirs. Politically isolated as left-wing, he and his KMM compatriots were initially opposed to UMNO, but when all political channels were closed with the outbreak of the communist insurgency in 1948, many of them joined UMNO.

In what seems like a remarkable political comeback in 1951, his name resurfaced in the crisis-ridden UMNO General Assembly after Datuk Onn Jaafar had resigned as president on the grounds of the party's refusal to open its doors to non-Malays.

Mustapha's standing was so strong that he was nominated to stand against Tunku Abdul Rahman and Datuk (later Tun) Abdul Razak for the posts of UMNO president and deputy president respectively. But he lost by one vote each time to both these rivals.

These were contests he had entered to please his old left-wing compatriots who were keen to capture UMNO and as a result his energies were almost spent. Even had he won, Mustapha would not have lasted long at his post, given his state of health.

These memoirs make enthralling reading and were dutifully compiled and completed by his daughter Insun after his death on 15 January 1987. Throughout the memoirs, Mustapha's voice cries out incessantly for justice and for recognition as a Malay nationalist.

In 1974, he had narrated his political struggles to a predominantly student audience at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia), then in Kuala Lumpur. The encounter was an emotional experience for both Mustapha and the audience.

"I cried along with them as memories of my bitter and gruelling experiences came flooding back," he recalls. "Involved in World War II as a Malay Fifth Columnist leader, detained in several (British) Police lock-ups and prisons, taunted and jeered by Malays who saw me hawking food on the roadside, humiliated by people who slammed their doors in my face, asked to leave my rented cubicle in the middle of the night and even labelled as the Malay who 'brought' the Japanese into Malaya, I left them with a tremendous sense of mental and emotional fulfilment. I had sown in these educated young souls the urge to struggle for justice."

In writing these memoirs, Mustapha was clearly able to release and assuage the cries of his own tormented soul for justice and recognition.

Afterword

William R. Roff

Mustapha Hussain's moving and absorbing narrative makes an important contribution to the history of the Malay radical Left. When I did the research for *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* at the outset of the 1960s, with the Communist 'Emergency' barely over, written records were few and personal recollections cautious. The politics of the Japanese Occupation period were little better served, for as I wrote in the introduction to the English translation of Ahmad Boestamam's political memoir, *Carving the Path to the Summit*, twenty years later in 1979, "this is still one of the least known periods of Malaysian history."¹ The quarter century since then has transformed this situation, with major publications from Malaysian and other historians and participants. Nonetheless, there is still a good deal that we do not know or do not fully understand.

Mustapha Hussain's important account of his youth and of his activities, while a lecturer at Serdang School of Agriculture in the 1930s and then during the harrowing years of the Japanese interregnum and the resumption of British rule, does much to remedy these lacunae. He has, I believe, done three things in particular to help adjust our understanding of the historiography of early Malay nationalism and the post-war struggle for independence from colonial rule.

In the first place, we perhaps need to rethink the role played by English education in radicalising an otherwise largely Malay-educated intelligentsia. Mustapha's account of his own exposure, often as an autodidact, to left-wing English-language publications, makes explicit the way in which literature of this kind helped give ideological muscle to anti-colonialism. Nor, of course, was he the only English-educated Malay to assume leadership in organisations like KMM and later the MNP, as witness Ishak Haji Muhammad, Ahmad Boestamam and many others who figure in Mustapha's story, whose educational background he is always careful to provide.

Secondly, Mustapha draws our attention to, indeed repeatedly agonises over, the part played by 'collaboration' in distorting Malay participation in post-Occupation nationalist activities. The issue of collaboration with

the Japanese regime in the peninsula, and how one might justify or defend it, has seldom been much of an issue in Malaysian historiography – as it has been, for example, in the Philippines. Mustapha's memoir, however, with its repeated reflections on 'guilt' and the need to expiate this or explain it away, suggests that this is not at all a simple matter.

To the detached observer, there seems no need to excuse Malays, in pursuit of nationalist ends, for assisting either Japanese rule or the British rule that preceded (and indeed followed) it. Clearly, Mustapha, strongly aware of active and armed (mainly left-wing) anti-Japanese resistance from the jungle, did not see it quite like this. Along with the repressive British security apparatus after re-occupation, this clearly undermined his capacity, and perhaps that of others, to play a fuller and more open part in the independence struggle.

But there are other questions here too. It seems possible that Mustapha was a good deal further to the left in his allegiances than emerges here (the repeated appearance in the text at crucial junctures of his self-confessed 'mentor', the Indonesian 'Trotskyist' Sutan Jenain, rather suggests this). If so, and given the obloquy attaching in Malaya from 1948 to communism, Mustapha's problems in finding a satisfactory identity and navigating a course for himself among these perilous shoals – collaboration on one bank, communism on the other – come more clearly into view. These cannot have been problems for him alone.

Thirdly – and this stems in part from the previous argument – Mustapha's memoirs are eloquent testimony to the tremendous damage that the colonial relationship and its inequalities does, both to individuals and to the societies of which they are a part. The petty humiliations and indignities to which many aspirant Malays were subject (as Mustapha details for himself); the relative immiserisation of a patronised Malay peasantry; the denial of the right to determine, or even to discuss in any radical way, the future of one's own people: all speak to the vitiating and ultimately destructive effects of colonial rule. If these are lessons we still have to learn at the outset of the 21st century, Mustapha Hussain speaks to them.

Above all, his is an intensely human account of one man's life and concerns, testimony to a long personal struggle for justice and freedom. Small wonder that he and many of his audience were in tears as he ended its initial recital.

Note

1. Ahmad Boestamam. *Carving the Path to the Summit*. Edited with an Introduction by William R. Roff (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1979): xv.

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