

## Tun Abdul Razak Hussein was PM

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MCA veteran Tan Sri Michael Chen, 76, was a minister in the Prime Minister's Department during Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's tenure as prime minister. He tells ARMAN AHMAD that the people were endeared to the country's second prime minister who is known as the father of development.

RAZAK was a man of the people. He spent half his time every week among the kampung folk and the rest trying to figure out how to improve their lot. Sometimes when the villages were flooded or when he crossed padi fields, he would go barefoot.

That's why the people loved him. He put his heart and soul into developing the country, and the people knew and appreciated it.

I was very lucky. I had an opportunity to work with him. I was parliamentary secretary in the deputy prime minister's office from 1964 to 1969 when he was the deputy prime minister.

I continued to work under him after I was made minister in the Prime Minister's Department in 1973.

He became prime minister at a time when the country was going through a period of turmoil. Razak became prime minister in 1970 - a year after the May 13, 1969 incident.

During his time as prime minister, you could call Razak a workaholic. He used to put in 14-hour days. But in those days, we were trying to achieve so much. We were trying to make sure the programmes for rural development were implemented.

He worked hard to improve education and provide a basic livelihood for the people.

He was always careful when he spoke. He was polite and, by nature, soft-spoken. He was a man of not too many words.

One thing special about Razak was that he could remember faces very well. He knew many of the kampung penghulu by name.

Other qualities that made him a good leader included wisdom and Courage to make a difference.

Razak was the man who forged diplomatic relations with China.

He was not only a national leader, but also a regional one.

He was dedicated and made many personal sacrifices.

Nobody could say he was corrupt. He never benefited or made money from his position.

When he was staying in the residence of the deputy prime minister, somebody suggested he build a swimming pool on the grounds.

(Razak used to go swimming at the Lake Club, but the pool had to be cleared of people each time he visited - causing inconvenience to everyone there.)

Early estimates of the cost were between RM20,000 and RM30,000. But it turned out that it would cost RM50,000. After he learned how much it would cost, he said he did not want one because that money could be used to build three rural clinics.

That was how careful the man was. People loved him because he loved the people.

It's hard to find leaders like this today. We see some of our leaders are very selfish and abuse their power and position.

We did not see this in the early days. Leaders like Tunku Abdul Rahman, Razak, Tun Hussein Onn and even Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to be fair to him, put the nation's interest above their own.

Razak became finance minister in 1974. The reason he took up the portfolio was because he wanted to bring up the image of the Malays in finance.

At that time, people did not believe in a Malay financial man. Until 1974, the finance minister had always been a Chinese. He did a good job and appeared competent.

Razak always looked very serious. But the truth is that he had a sense of humour under that serious countenance.

I remember when he went to London and bumped into a European expatriate who had worked in Malaysia.

The man exclaimed: "You bear an amazing resemblance to Tun Razak". He replied: "Yes.. actually, I'm his brother."

When Razak worked at the former prime minister's office in Jalan Dato Onn, the punch card had not been introduced like in Dr Mahathir's time.

However, he was a very punctual man who would turn up at the office at exactly 8am every day.

One of the things that many people don't realise is that Dr Mahathir was not the person who popularised the bush jacket.

Tunku Abdul Rahman had worn it first but it was Razak who popularised it.

He said that we needed a uniform that made us look like we meant business. Our weather was a bit too warm to wear a suit every day and besides, in those days, the air-conditioning wasn't that good.

So, Razak wore the bush jacket - which was more acceptable to the people compared with a man in a suit. Soon, all of us were wearing bush jackets.

He was also a sort of fashion innovator. Formerly, the bush jacket was short-sleeved but he changed it to long sleeves.

Another interesting thing about Razak is that he was the prime minister who introduced the prime minister's open house as we know it today.

One of the things that he was trying to do at the time was to improve race relations. He decided that there should be more interaction among the races and one good way to do it was during the traditional Hari Raya open house.

It was first held in 1971 at his own residence. A few thousand people came. It was very unusual at the time, and everybody commented how good this culture was. The following year, they held it at Parliament House, but people said the atmosphere was not the same. So the next year, they again held it at Razak's residence.

Now, it has become a tradition.

It is ironic that his son, Datuk Seri Najib, would become prime minister at a time when Barisan Nasional is facing such difficulties.

In some ways, it is reminiscent of the time when Razak entered office. The Alliance hadn't done well in the election and this was followed by the May 13 incident. But Razak took over the premiership, and he managed to restructure the Alliance. He introduced very practical and sound policies for the country.

I've known Najib since he was 11 years old. He has been brought up under very conducive circumstances. He has all the experience needed after serving 35 years in so many posts. I think he has what it takes to be a good leader.