

THE STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE OF THE MALAYSIAN PARLIAMENT BUILDING – CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

The current Parliament Building where Members of Parliament meet three times a year was officially opened on **2 November 1963**. It is no mere coincidence that as Malaysia turns 50 this year, Parliament building turns 50 as well. The calling into being of a new nation and the raising of a new Parliament House in the same year (1963) represent two significant milestones in the evolution of the legislature in the country.¹

Much has transpired in this august house, where Bills are debated, passed, repealed and amended from time to time. Numerous books, articles and reports have been written on the formation of Malaysia. However, the impact that the merger had on the legislature and continues to have is less expounded. This article, the prelude to four more, hopes to capture some of the important events that have transpired since. Five articles, each capturing a period of ten years will be posted on Parliament's website. The first ten years will cover the period from 1963 till 1973, the second ten years from 1974 to 1984, the third from 1985 to 1995, the fourth from 1996 to 2006 and finally the fifth from 2007 to 2 November 2013.

Uncanny as it may seem, 2 November 1963 fell on a Saturday as well. As Malaysians of Indian origin celebrate Deepavali (Diwali), the festival of lights to commemorate the triumph of good over evil, on this date this year, we should also seek not to forget this

¹ The Journey of Democracy – Commemorating 50 Years of Parliament, National Archives of Malaysia, 2009

important date in the history of Parliament. We should not renege the history of Parliament to collect dust on the shelves, but like law, it should be taken down from time to time, dusted and constantly taught to every new Member of Parliament. A complete understanding of Parliament would thus be instilled as without an iota of doubt, Parliament is the beacon of democracy. In the eyes of the writer Parliament building which has existed for exactly 50 years now, is the most magnificent of all buildings in Malaysia, especially so when it is beautifully lighted up in the stillness of the night.

The Year 1963

Formation of Malaysia in 1963 called for the new Parliament building

The anticipated increase in parliamentary representation necessitated by the proposed merger called for the construction of a new Parliament House. The Malaysian Parliament officially sat for the first time in 1963 in the new building, Malaysia had been formed on 16 September of the same year. It has been said that the name Malaysia itself was coined in the early eighteenth century. The idea of a Federation of the British territories in Southeast Asia had been evident in British thinking on the future of South-East Asia since the end of the Second World War. The probability is that Malaya became known as Malaysia (to connote the combination of Malaya and Asia).

British policy makers had spoken of the possibility of a political grouping covering the Federation of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo Territories (Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei) since the late 1940s but the idea never obtained serious official consideration in Whitehall until the late 1950s.² The idea of a union between Malaya and the Borneo states

²Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng and Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore-A 700 Year History – From Early Emporium to World City*. National Archives of Singapore, 2009

had been discussed within the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) circles as early as 1956. Singapore's first Chief Minister, David Marshall too had pursued the merger objective. Detached from the Federation after the war and ruled as a separate Crown Colony from 1946, Singapore was granted some degree of internal self-government by the *Rendell Constitution* of 1955.³

In July 1957 Sir Anthony Abel revived the question of Borneo unity. He insisted that it was in the interest of Brunei and Sarawak and 'perhaps' North Borneo to work out their own salvation rather than to link up with Singapore and Malaya.⁴ Sir Anthony envisaged the union as a partnership in which the central authority would be responsible for defence, external relations, internal security and communication, including civil aviation, postal services and telecommunications.

With the growth of confidence between the partners the common services could be extended to trade, customs, banking, currency, medicine and agriculture. Recognizing the sensitivity of the question of finance, he said that the three governments would continue to control their separate revenues and expenditures. He also admitted that without the preservation of '*those traditional characteristics of which all three territories are rightly and properly proud*,' the idea of Federation or any other form of political partnership would be unacceptable at least 'to one of the territories.'⁵

Sir Anthony envisaged a Governor-General to act as the Queen's representative in North Borneo and Sarawak and a High Commissioner in Brunei. The Governor-General would

³ Sunday Times 22 May 1961

⁴ Straits Times, 24 July 1957

⁵ Straits Times, 18 February, 1958

⁵ Straits Budget, 5 March 1958

preside from time to time over meetings of the Supreme Council in Kuching and over the Executive Council in Jesselton. His advisers were to be drawn from the Executive and Legislative Councils of the two Councils, but he would not sit in Sarawak's Council Negeri or in North Borneo's Legislative Council. Under the Governor-General there would be a Lieutenant – Governor in each of the two colonies.

The proposals met with a negative response. North Borneo considered them premature. It was thought that the government should wait for a mandate from the people which was then unobtainable because of the absence of elected representatives. Members representing commercial and professional bodies of four communities – the Europeans, the Chinese, the Indians and the Malays said that although some form of a Federation between the territories was inevitable, it should be delayed for 'thirty to one hundred years'. ⁶

The following month, the Governor of North Borneo, Sir Ronald Turnbull made another attempt. As President of the North Borneo Legislative Council he persuaded the Council to recommend that agreements be obtained from the governments of Brunei and Sarawak to examine the possibilities of a closer constitutional link between the three territories. For this purpose, it was suggested that a body of persons, drawn from the three territories should make detailed recommendations for the three governments to be considered. ⁷

North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak still had the time- honoured colonial executive and legislative councils with official majorities and unofficial minorities, all of whom were appointed by the Governor. In North Borneo, the first elections to the Town Boards and

⁷Straits Times, 12 April 1958

District Councils were first held in December 1962 and the first political party emerged only after the Malaysia proposal of 1961.

Though the concept of an association between Malaya, Singapore and the three Borneo territories was not a new idea, it was given new weightage when Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya, spoke in terms of a South-East Asian Community at the Foreign Correspondents Association in Singapore on 27 May 1961, wherein he had stated:

Malaya today as a nation realizes that she cannot stand alone and in isolation ...Sooner or later she should have an understanding with Britain and the peoples of the territories of Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak...We should look ahead to this objective and think of a plan whereby these territories can be brought closer together in political and economic cooperation.

Tunku had suggested that Malaya must have an understanding with Britain and the governments of Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo (Sabah) and Brunei to bring these five territories into a closer economic and political co-operation.⁸Tunku said that it was too early to elaborate on what form the association would take, but it was generally believed that either Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak should come in as separate member-states of an enlarged Federation of Malaya, or an independent State of Singapore and the proposed Borneo Federation of Malaya in a confederation of Malaysian States.⁹

⁸R.O.Tilman, *In Quest of Unity: The Centralization Theme in Malaysia Federal –State Relations, 1957-1975*

⁹Straits Times 29 May 1961

Whitehall had intimated that the British government plan for the Borneo territories was first to give a measure of self-government and later when their people had shown themselves capable of governing, they were to choose whether to have independence separately or together with Brunei in a Borneoan Federation or to merge with the Federation of Malaya.¹⁰

Tunku argued that the implementation of this policy would take a very long time and that in the meantime the Communists would stand a good chance of infiltrating the territories and spreading their activities. The formation of Malaysia would not only frustrate the designs of the communists but would also be a short cut to Borneoan independence, because in the new Federation these territories would be given the same rights and the same status as those enjoyed by the member-States of the Federation of Malaya.¹¹ Tunku later said, *'To say that the peoples there (in the Borneo territories) are not ready, I think is wrong.'* (*Federation of Malaya Parliamentary Debates, ibid*)

While the British government seemed reluctant to include the Borneo territories in the Malaysia plan, it seemed that Malaysia might be the best answer to her dilemma of removing the last vestiges of British colonialism from South-East Asia. Coupled with this was the fact that the United Nation's resolution passed by the General Assembly in 1960, called for the ending of colonialism throughout the world¹²

¹⁰The Malay mail 6 November 1961

¹¹ The Malay Mail 8 August 1961 and Federation of Malaya, *Parliamentary Debates*(Dewan Rakyat) 16 October 1961.

¹²On 14 December 1960, by a vote of 89 in favour, none against and nine abstentions (including Great Britain) the General Assembly adopted a resolution by which it solemnly proclaimed 'the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end to colonialism in all its forms and manifestations.' U.N. General Assembly 15th Regular session', *Commonwealth Survey*, Vol. VII, No.11 (23 May 1961)

Formation of Malaysia was not without controversy and consternation. Opposition to the merger took many forms and came from many quarters. Opposition from Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines had to be surmounted diplomatically. To quote Mackie, *‘in military terms, it was miniscule, yet the political stakes at issue seemed important enough to influence the destiny of the entire South East Asian region’*.¹³

The revolt led by AM Azahari had to be contained as well. Nine Socialist Front leaders in Malaya were detained under the Internal Security Regulations. The Malayan Member of Parliament, Ahmad Boestaman was detained in February 1963 on charges of framing a secret underground movement for subversive purposes and maintaining contact with the Indonesian Communist Party.¹⁴ Similarly 100 Members of *Barisan Sosialis* including Lim Chin Siong and the Puthucheary brothers were detained in Singapore.¹⁵

The admission of the new states required enlargement of the numbers in the Federal Parliament. In the Senate, the appointed and elected memberships were increased from 16 to 22 and 22 to 28 respectively. Two members each from the new states would be elected by their legislature, while six others would be appointed. In the House of Representatives, the numbers would be enlarged from 104 to 159. Sarawak had 24 members, Sabah had 16 and Singapore had 15.¹⁶ Malay was accepted as the National language. A transitional period of ten years was allowed to the Borneo states. In the case of Sarawak, a native language was allowed to be used in the Legislative Assembly.

¹³Constitutional Landmarks in Malaysia – The First 50 Years, 1957-2007, (editors Andrew Harding and HP Lee) Lexis Nexis, 2007, Kuala Lumpur

¹⁴Mackie, *‘Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute 1963-1966’*, Oxford University Press, 1974, Kuala Lumpur

¹⁵Constitutional Landmarks (above)

¹⁶Article 46, Federal Constitution

The Malaysia Agreement was signed on 9 July 1963 by the governments of the Federation of Malaya, the United Kingdom, Sarawak, North Borneo and Singapore. By virtue of this Agreement, the states of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore would federate with Kedah, Perlis, Penang, Perak, Kelantan, Trengganu, Pahang, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Johor and the Federation was called 'Malaysia'. The Federal Parliament then passed the Malaysia Act.¹⁷

¹⁷ Act No. 26 of 1963

Malaysia Act 1963

Ch. 35

1

ELIZABETH II



1963 CHAPTER 35

An Act to make provision for and in connection with
the federation of North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore
with the existing States of the Federation of Malaya.
[31st July 1963]

BE IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and
with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and
Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament
assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1.—(1) For the purpose of enabling North Borneo, Sarawak Malaysia.
and Singapore (in this Act referred to as “the new States”) to
federate with the existing States of the Federation of Malaya
(in this Act referred to as “the Federation”), the Federation
thereafter being called Malaysia, on the day on which the new
States are federated as aforesaid (in this Act referred to as “the
appointed day”) Her Majesty's sovereignty and jurisdiction
in respect of the new States shall be relinquished so as to vest in
the manner agreed between the United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland, the Federation and the new States.

(2) Her Majesty may by Order in Council enact State Constitu-
tions to take effect for the new States immediately before the
appointed day.

2.—(1) On and after the appointed day the British Nationality Consequential
Acts 1948 and 1958 shall have effect as if in subsection (3) of modifications
section 1 of the Act of 1948 (which provides for persons to be of British
British subjects or Commonwealth citizens by virtue of citizenship Nationality
of certain countries) for the words “the Federation of Malaya, Acts.
the State of Singapore” there were substituted the word
“Malaysia”.

The Malaysia Act 1963

The original date set for Malaysia's formation was 31 August, Merdeka Day. However, on 24 August it was announced that a new date was to be fixed by the British Colonial Secretary

Duncan Sandys. The United Nations Secretary-General had announced that two UN teams would go to Sarawak and Borneo to assess the 'Malaya sentiment' in the British led territories. Tunku had this to say on the announcement by U Thant: *'It is a waste of manpower, time and money...I fail to understand the fuss.'* As for the postponement, Tunku said, *'We are taking it as a matter of course,...The people of Malaya are very cool. This is the attitude of mature people.'* (1957-2007)

In addition, in the debates over the Malaysia Bill in the Dewan Rakyat, opposition Members of Parliament had argued that the Federal government had failed to consult the eleven states. The Kelantan State Government commenced legal proceedings six days prior to the declaration of Malaysia on 16 September 1963, (on 10 September 1963). The action was against the Federal Government stating that the Malaysia Agreement and the Malaysia Act were null and void and/or was not binding on Kelantan, vide *State of Kelantan v The Government of the Federation of Malaya and Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al Haj*.¹⁸

The question the Court had to consider was whether Parliament or the Executive government had trespassed in any way the limits placed on their powers by the Constitution. The Court decided that the issue was not whether the Federation of Malaya would transmogrify into a new and different Federation. The question to be addressed was whether or not any radical change would in fact result from what was done by Parliament and the Executive government but whether they had acted outside the Constitution.

Despite the constraints of time, the CJ delivered the decision of the Court 30 hours before Malaysia was born. The decision had had significant implications on Parliament. The CJ's comment is often quoted: *'Never, I think has a Judge had to pronounce on an issue of such magnitude on so little notice and with so little time for consideration.'*¹⁹ In delivering the

¹⁸ 1 MLJ (1963)

¹⁹ MLJ 1963

decision, the CJ stated: *‘Today however, the Court is sitting in exceptional circumstances. Time is short and the sands are running out. We cannot close our eyes and our ears to the conditions prevailing in the world around us and a clearer expression of opinion than would be customary is clearly required in a matter which relates to the interests of political stability in this part of Asia and the interests of ten million people, about half a million of them being inhabitants of the State of Kelantan.’*²⁰

What is of relevance to Parliament is of course the much celebrated *obiter dicta* of the CJ on his comment on Parliament’s powers in passing the Malaysia Act. He had observed, *‘In doing these things I cannot see that Parliament went in any way beyond its powers or that it did anything so fundamentally revolutionary as to require fulfilment of a condition which the Constitution itself does not prescribe that is to say a condition to the effect that the State of Kelantan or any other state should be consulted.’*²¹

The above became known as the basic structure doctrine. It was upheld by the Supreme Court of India in the much celebrated case of *KesavanandaBharati v The State of Kerala*²² which in turn is oft-quoted in most Commonwealth countries.

As a result of merger, the Federal Constitution of 1957 was altered. The Constitution (Amendment) Act 1962 added a new paragraph (bb) to Article 159(4) requiring only a simple majority for the passing of ‘an amendment made for or in connection with the admission of any State to the Federation. The 1962 amendment has been viewed as a mark of confidence by Parliament. The Malaysia Act 1963 amended the Constitution in order to admit the three new states.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² All India Reports (1973)

Article 159(4) (bb) of the Federal Constitution was made subject to Article 161E of the Federal Constitution. Article 161E provided for safeguards for Sabah and Sarawak. Article 2 of the 1957 Constitution of the Federation of Malaya enabled the admission of new states to the Federation by a simple majority in Parliament. The Malaysia Act amended the Constitution to admit the three new states and to accommodate the constitutional bargain between the Federal government and Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore.

Perhaps the best compliment for the merger came from the special feature in the *National Geographic* magazine which gave a pen-portrait of Malaysia and a wealth of photographs of the newly born nation. New Zealand travel writer Maurice Shadbolt and staff photographer Winfield Parks had roamed for months through ‘tin-and-rubber rich Malaya, teeming Singapore and their wild, romantic neighbours, Sarawak and North Borneo’.²³ Shadbolt wrote that Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman ‘*described these far-flung lands to me as a crescent of freedom*’.

The New Malaysian Parliament Building in 1963

Malaysian democracy took a step forward with the opening of the Ringgit Malaysia 17 million Parliament House. An area close to the Lake Gardens in Kuala Lumpur was selected for this purpose. Construction on the Parliament Complex commenced in September 1962.²⁴ Design of the building had begun in 1960. The architect in charge of the construction of the building was W. Ivor Shipley. The original schedule was set at 31 August 1963 which was supposed to mark the establishment of Malaysia as well.

²³

²⁴ *ibid*

It was a race against time for the men and women who had been told to make every effort possible to finish construction for the official opening of the building on 2 November 1963. Shipley who headed the design team was sent to India for 11 days. On the day that he was leaving for India, he said that he ‘was going with an open mind. To me the object of his visit is to study planning rather than aesthetic problems.’²⁵

His colleagues were Hamzah bin Mahmood, Chan Kong Yew (both Malaysians), Crawford (an Englishman) and Pritchard (an Australian). Shipley had been directly concerned with some of the Federation’s major architectural works, including Penang’s new Council Chamber and the airport extension; the alterations to Istana Negara; the BalaiRong where the Paramount Ruler was invested in office; the Central Bank (Bank Negara) and the temporary houses of Parliament in Maxwell Road.

When Shipley arrived in India, he was to go straight to Chandrigah, the architect’s dream town which was planned straight from the ground by a team of international designers. He was to make a careful study of all the public buildings, with particular attention to the Parliamentary offices. The Malaysian High Commission had agreed for him to tour Delhi to study the Houses of Parliament that had been built 30 years previously. He was then to proceed to Lahore in West Pakistan to have a look at some general features of Islamic architecture. As Shipley stated, *‘My main interest in this massive design will be to study the accommodation. We must remember firstly that what we build here will have to last us a long time. We must look to the future to allow for any contingency. Design is a minor problem compared with the essential practical requirements which the building must fulfil.’*²⁶

²⁵The Malay Mail, 9 April 1960

²⁶ Ibid

ARCHITECT GOES TO INDIA WITH OPEN MIND

THE architect's eye view of India that will presage the building of the Federation's new Houses of Parliament will not necessarily influence their style.

Mr. W. I. Shipley, the Public Works Department architect, who will head the design for the project, said before he was due to leave for India today that he was going with "an open mind."

"To me the object of my visit is to study planning rather than aesthetic problems," he said. "The climate, which must have a greater influence on building than anything else, is very different here from the climate in India."

Mr. Shipley will spend 11 days in India before returning to plunge straight into the planning with his four-man team of colleagues.

Working with Mr. Shipley will be a Malay, a Chinese, an Englishman and an

Both houses of Parliament to be 'practical'

Australian. Briefed on their task already are Inche Hamzah bin Mahmood, Mr. Chan Kong Yew and Mr. D. Pritchard. The Englishman, Mr. Crawford, has not yet arrived in Malaya.

Major works

Mr. Shipley himself has been directly concerned with some of the Federation's major architectural works in recent years.

After carrying out a lot of planning in Penang, including the new Council Chamber and the airport extension, he came to Kuala Lumpur to map out

alterations to the Istana Negara.

The Balai Rong Senai, where the late Paramount Ruler was invested in office, was also his responsibility, and he supervised the planning again when it was later converted into the Tengku Abdul Rahman Hall.

Other landmarks to his credit are the Central Bank and the temporary Houses of Parliament in Maxwell Road.

When he arrives in

India, Mr. Shipley will go straight to Chandigarh, the architects' dream town which was planned, straight from the ground, by a team of international designers.

Careful study

There he will make a careful study of all the public buildings, with particular attention to the Parliamentary offices.

"My main interest in this chunky and massive design will be to

study the accommodation," he said.

The Malayan High Commission has arranged for him to tour New Delhi on a similar mission, studying the Houses of Parliament that were built there nearly 30 years ago.

Lastly, he will pay a call on Lahore, in West Pakistan, to have a look at some general features of Islamic architecture.

"I have received no instructions to follow Islamic influence in the design for our own Houses of Parliament," said Mr. Shipley.

"We must remember firstly that what we build here will have to last us a long time. We must look to the future and allow for any contingency."

"Design is a minor problem compared with the essential practical requirements which the building must fulfil."

The Malay Mail, 9 April 1960



A Model of Parliament Building on 30.9.1960 (Source: National Archives of Malaysia)



Parliament House under construction (Picture dated 31.7.1963). Source: National Archives of Malaysia.



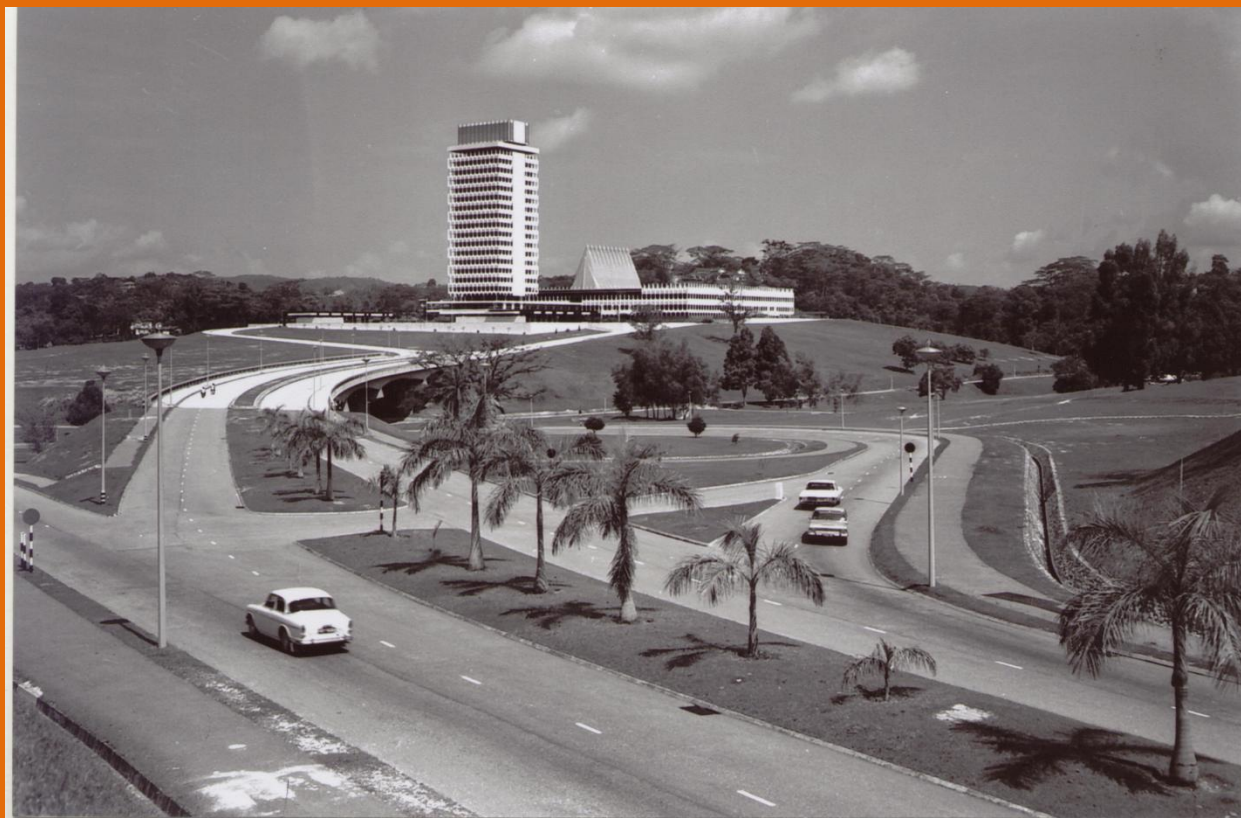
The imposing 18-storey Tower Block of Malaysia's Building, nearing completion (Picture dated 15.10.1963). Source: National Archives of Malaysia.



A view of the Senate Chamber nearing completion (Picture dated 15.10.1963 Source: National Archives of Malaysia).



Picture of Parliament Building on 31.7.1963 (Source: National Archives of Malaysia)



Picture of Parliament Building in 1964 (Source: National Archives of Malaysia)

Opening of Parliament Building on 2 November 2013

A fanfare of trumpets greeted the arrival of their Majesties at 9.25 a.m. The King was in gold-coloured national costume and the Queen in beige. When their Majesties occupied positions on a specially built dais in the first floor lobby, the National Anthem was played and the first part of the morning's proceedings got under way. The first to speak was the

Minister of Works, Posts and Telecommunications, Tun V.T. Sambanthan, whose Ministry was responsible for building Parliament House. In his speech Sambanthan traced various aspects of the ‘gigantic building operation.’ He stated that the project would not have materialised had it not been for the **‘farsightedness of the father of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman’**. Sambanthan said, ‘It is here that MPs will undertake the historic responsibility of making democracy work. It is here that they will have to rise above daily trifles or the call of narrow provincialism or linguistic, religious or sectarian chauvinism.’²⁷

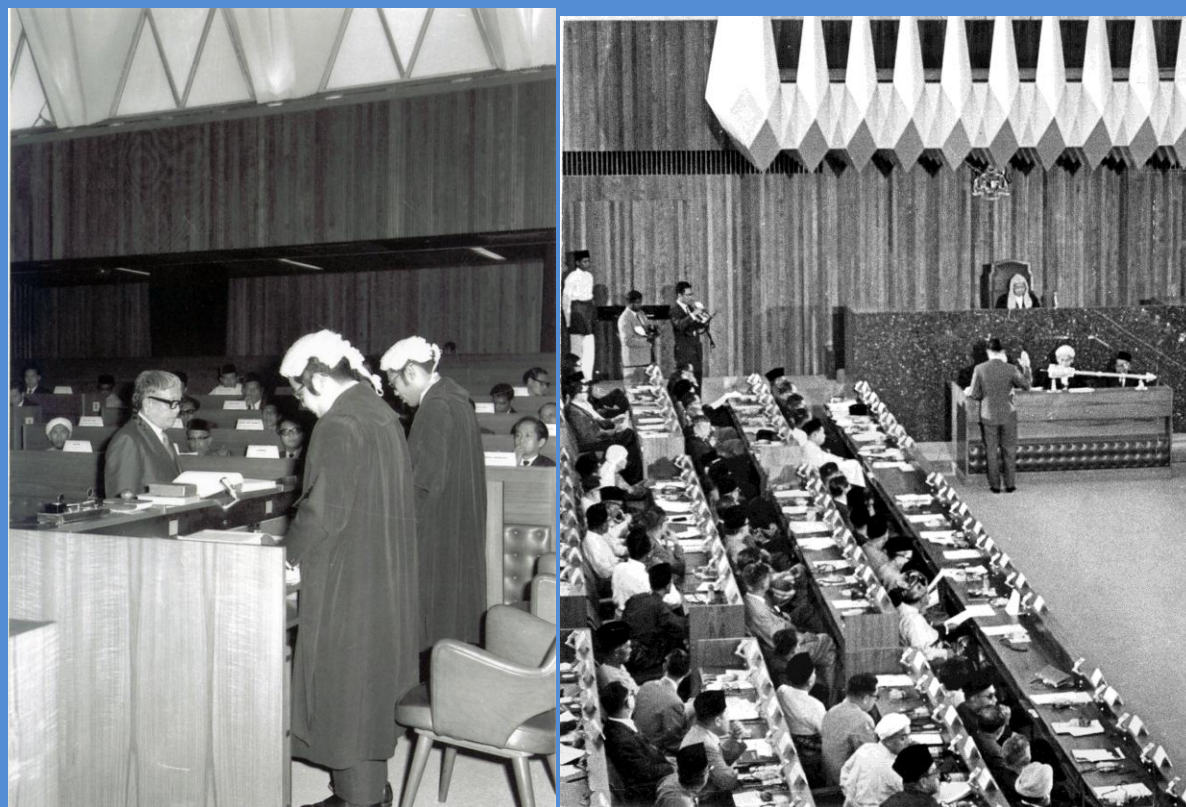
When declaring open Parliament House, the King in his address described the country’s Senate and Lower House as ‘twin dynamos’ of democracy. The new Parliament building, coupled with a new Constitution, was a newer and larger dynamo of democracy.²⁸ The King said this of the new House, which rises majestically above the Lake Gardens: ‘There can be no grander witness than this great structure itself of the ideals and hopes that people of Malaysia share – no finer gesture to the future of the faith and confidence they have in the continuing, peace and happiness of Malaysia.

His Majesty also stated that the deep and lasting significance of the building did not lie in the fact that it was an architectural harmony of concrete and glass, steel and stone. The significance was in the function and purpose for which the building was conceived, created and constructed for. ‘What is profoundly important here is that this building symbolises our highest ideals of democracy.’ Stating that the building was also ‘visible proof’ of the Government’s belief in the party systems of government, the King said: ‘This system we have found from our experience, is the most suitable form of democracy for Malaysia. Not only is the parliamentary system capable of voicing and exercising the public will, but it can also produce stability and order in administration as well as effective results in progress

²⁷ New Sunday Times 3 November 1963

²⁸Chronicles of Malaysia – Fifty Years of Headline News – 1957-2007(Editor –in- Chief Philip Mathews) Didier Millet, Kuala Lumpur, 2007

and property for our nation and people.’ Their Majesties then proceeded to the ground floor where the King unveiled the beautiful bronze plaque.



Swearing in of Members of Parliament in the new Parliament Building

55 new MPs were sworn in at the oak-panelled, plush 159-seat chamber of the House of Representatives. After the swearing-in-ceremony, the House of Representatives unanimously thanked the King for ‘the magnificent’ building. The vote was taken on a resolution moved by Tunku, which stated: ‘We the Speaker and Members of the Dewan Rakyat desire humbly to thank

Your Majesty for this most magnificent building here in Your Majesty's capital town of Kuala Lumpur which Your Majesty, in graciously declaring open on this day has dedicated forever to the purposes of the Parliament of Malaysia.' Tunku also stressed that the victory of the Alliance in Sabah and Sarawak and of the People's Action Party in Singapore showed 'very clearly' that the people of these territories wanted Malaysia. 'In Singapore, when the danger of anti-Malaysia appeared likely to succeed, all the people threw their lot in with the PAP'.

Tunku added: 'Together we will start to plan and work for a happy Malaysia. This is indeed a truly holistic moment in the history of Malaysia.' Welcoming the new MPs Tunku said he was certain they would carry on all the 'fine traditions' of Parliament already established in a spirit of loyal and devoted service.' He continued 'As MPs we hold positions of great responsibility and trust, particularly in these difficult days when Malaysia has become a target for unearned and unmerited rebuke as the result of a hostile policy of confrontation. To counter and face this hostility and to uphold the integrity and honour of our country we must know that throughout Malaysia there is a strong and abiding spirit of national unity'. Whatever difference of party there may be, these are the aims and objects which must guide and unite us in the interests of our new nation.'





Referring to the new chamber, Tunku said members might feel somewhat awed by all its splendour and magnificence. He hoped that the rich surroundings would not have the effect of inducing respectful silence in the members or a ‘quiet retirement’ to the member’s room – for each had his own room. If this happened, he said, ‘we will not be able to get on with the business of Parliament. However, as Tunku knew, the ‘rest and loquacity’ of the members on both sides of the House had no fear of this unlikely even occurring.

Tunku said he had been asked why there was a need for an expensive House of Parliament and not a simple building. His answer was, ‘we want a building not only for assembly, but also to exist as a monument to democracy, for so long as this building remains, democracy will prevail in this country’. He added: ‘We will undoubtedly hear many arguments and differences of opinion, for that, after all, is the way of democracy. Combined together, this Parliament speaks and acts for the whole nation. As members of this House, let us never fail to forget this fact. **This is the reason for the responsibility, the trust and the confidence the people of Malaysia have delegated to us’.**



The House of Representatives had some similar green fittings as those in the House of Commons at Westminster in the United Kingdom

The Year 1964

The National Service Bill was passed on 16 July 1964. The Bill provided for the establishment of a National Service Reserve in which trained youths would serve for five years. The previous 12 year old National Service Ordinance was thus amended. Lim Huan Boon of Barisan Nasionalis was the only Opposition Member of Parliament who spoke out against the Bill in the House of Representatives.

On 28 December 1964, Tun Abdul Razah announced in Parliament that Malaysia was rejecting a defence loan offer by the United States. He stated, *'We are defending not only our Independence, but also democracy of this part of the world.'*

The Year 1965

In 1965, Singapore became an independent sovereign State, separate from Malaysia, following an amendment to the Constitution, which had been approved unanimously by both Houses of Parliament, under a certificate of urgency. This was subsequent to the signing of the Independence of Singapore Agreement on 7 August by both Governments. This once again affected the Legislature as seats had to be delineated. Tunku with his usual wit stated: *'If you marry a pretty girl and do not get on well with her, you have got to divorce her'*.²⁹

²⁹ Parliamentary Debates, Dewan Rakyat, 1965

Once, when Tun Razak was speaking in Parliament and Lee Kuan Yew interrupted several times, the Speaker eventually told Lee, *'Would you please sit down. The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister has the right to be heard in silence.'*³⁰



Some Members of Parliament in the new Parliament building prior to separation in 1965

³⁰3 June 1965

On the evening of 25 August 1965 on Women’s Day, the Queen was guest-of-honour at a women-only dinner at Parliament building. This was the first of its kind. The celebration was the biggest since Women’s Day was inaugurated in 1962.

The Year 1966

It was also in 1966 that the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1966,³¹ which further made five changes to the Constitution, namely, (i) amendments for the removal of Singapore from Malaysia, (ii) amendments relating to the general elections in the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, (iii) amendments pursuant to the Malaysia Act 1963, (iv) amendments affecting the High Court and the Federal Court and (v) amendments relating to the powers of the Public Services. The new Clause 5B into Article 144 provided for the appointment, confirmation and emplacement of public servants, the powers of promotion and discipline were transferred from the Public Services Commission to the Heads of Departments.

The new Clause 5B (i) provided that the power and functions of the Public Services Commission, other than the power of first appointment, were to be exercised by a board appointed by the Agong. This Board was to be appointed by the Agong and to be comprised of Heads of Departments. Tun Razak (the then Deputy Prime Minister) clarified that the aim of the amendment was to ensure that civil servants carried out their work more efficiently by giving more powers to the Heads of Departments.³²

In 1966, an Act of Parliament was passed to provide for the setting up of the National Family Planning Board to implement Malaysia’s national family planning programme.

³¹Act 59 of 1966

³² 22 August 1966

According to Tun Abdul Razak³³ who stated in 1970, *‘some economists have estimated that if India and Mexico, for example, could reduce their present birth-rate of 40 per 1,000 in 25 years’ time, their living standard would rise by 40 percent in a single generation. This is the cold, hard fact of population pressure on economic growth. It is also a pointer to what can be achieved by lessening this pressure.*³⁴ He has been proven right of course.

The amendment was criticized with the reasoning that the civil service might in turn be ‘riddled with nepotism, corruption and patronage’³⁵ Rais Yatim in his book has stated that it is easy to notice that the amendment to Article 144 in the light of this amendment appears to be a deviation from the recommendations of the Reid Commission.³⁶ The Reid Commission Report³⁷ laid down two principles, namely (1) Promotions policy should be regulated in accordance with publicly recognized professional principles. The promotions must be determined impartially on the basis of official qualifications, experience and merit; and (2) Reasonable security of tenure and an absolute freedom from arbitrary application of disciplinary provisions are essential foundations of a public service.³⁸

³³ At the opening of the combined programme and evaluation of Malaysia’s National Family Programme at Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman on 18 March 1970

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Parliamentary Debates, Dewan Rakyat, 22 August 1966

³⁶ Rais Yatim, *Freedom Under Executive Power in Malaysia – A Study of Executive Supremacy*, 1995, Endowment Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur. See paras 153 and 154 of the *Reid Commission Report*

³⁷ Para 153

³⁸ Rais Yatim, *Freedom Under Executive Power in Malaysia – A Study of Executive Supremacy*, 1995, Endowment Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur. See paras 153 and 154 of the *Reid Commission Report*



People from all walks of life taking in the scenery of Parliament Building in December 1966 (Source: National Archives of Malaysia).

The first, last and only American President to set foot on Malaysian soil, Lyndon Johnson attended a State banquet in Parliament House in October 1966. It has been said that a special bed had to be made as President Johnson was an extremely tall man. Upon arrival at Subang Airport, the President delivered the following remarks:

Your Majesties, the Honorable Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to be here in Malaysia. I feel that I know you because Malaysia, like the United States, is a federation of States which were once colonies of Great Britain--and because Malaysia is, like the United States, a nation of many diverse peoples, different religions, and different cultures. Here, as in America, you are working to reduce racial tensions so that all men may live in peace with one another.

Malaysia, like the United States, has been making great social and economic progress, based on the concept of personal initiative. That concept--that a man should be free to make the best of his life as he sees fit--is one that the people of America cherish.

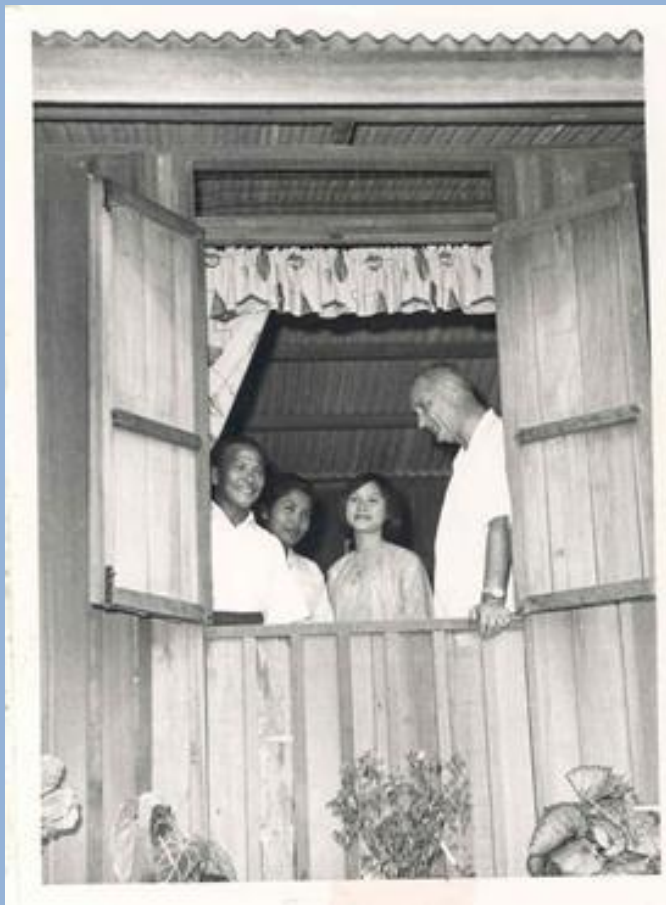
But though I feel that I know you, I have come here to learn from you. I know that your nation is a model of what may be done by determined and farsighted men in Southeast Asia, and in other parts of the world. You valiantly subdued a Communist insurgency in your own nation. And then, from the very same room where you once planned battle strategy, you planned the works of peace. You began building a free and prospering countryside that can relieve the poverty and the apathy upon which communism so often thrives.

Your achievement in this respect, I believe, has the greatest significance for our struggle in Vietnam today. You have shown that military action can stop Communist aggression, and that while the aggression is being stopped, and even more strongly when it is stopped--the peace, as well as the war, can be won.

Your example offers us hope for the future. It is a great pleasure to be here and to see it firsthand.

*Mrs. Johnson and I look forward with great pleasure to our stay with you. Thank you very much.*³⁹

³⁹**Citation:** Lyndon B. Johnson: "Remarks Upon Arrival at Subang Airport, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.," October 30, 1966. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27969>



President Johnson visits a traditional Malaysian home. A village was named Kampung LBJ in his honor. (Source: Embassy of Malaysia Library)

The Year 1967

The Dewan Rakyat passed the National Language Bill, making Malay the sole national language with 45 votes for and 11 against. The Bill paved the way to make the Malay language the sole national language of the country. The Act became official on 1 September 1967.



D.Y.M.M. Seri Paduka Baginda Yang Di Pertuan Agong officially opening the new session of Parliament in 1967 (Source: Parliament Malaysia 1968)



Their Majesties proceeding to Parliament Building on 14.6.1967 (Source: National Archives of Malaysia)

The Year 1968

Education Minister, Mohamed KhirJohari called for free schooling so that no child would be left behind due to poverty. A Bill making it an offence punishable by law to fail to stand when the Negaraku is played was passed in February 1968.

The Year 1969

Suspension of Parliament and the National Consultative Council

The one black spot in Malaysia's history took place in 1969. Parliament was suspended in the wake of the 13 May crisis. The NOC was established. Parliament reconvened on 20 February 1971.



Yang di-Pertuan Agong formally declares open Parliament in Kuala Lumpur on 22.2.1971. Picture shows his Majesty taking the Royal Salute on the dais. Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein and Toh Puan Rahah are in the background.



A view of the House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) on 22.2.1971 (Source: National Archives of Malaysia).



Littering became an offence in the Federal Capital under stringent laws approved by the National Operations Council. Under the law, litterbugs were to be fined RM500 for the first offence and RM 1,000 for the second or subsequent offences. The laws, signed by the Director of Operations, Tun Abdul Razak, came into effect on 1 December 1969.

Tun Abdul Razak, as Deputy Prime Minister had suggested an Inter-dependence Day *'because we, as a multi-racial nation, owe our independence to the interdependence of each and every Malaysia, irrespective of racial origin.'*

The Year 1970

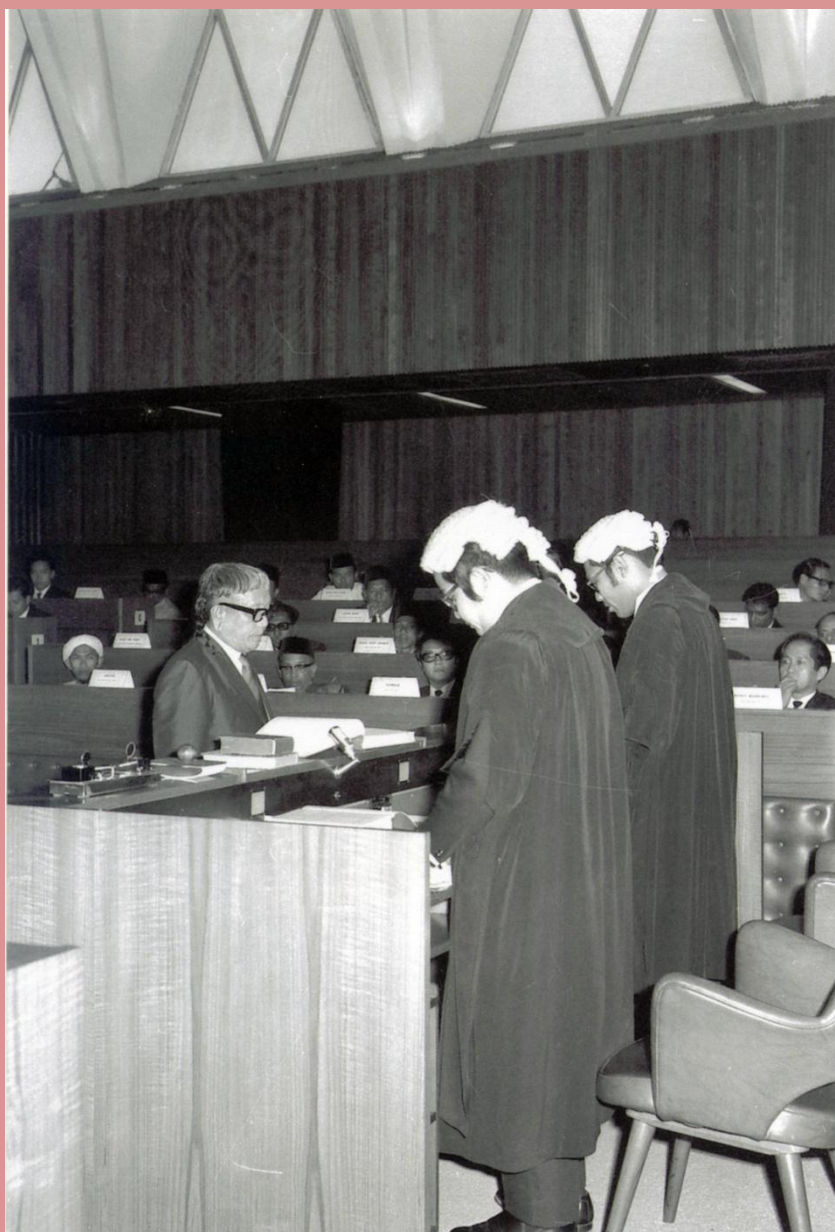
Tunku's statue which was originally sculptured in 1967 was installed at the entrance to the Parliament House after Tunku's retirement in 1970.

The Year 1971

The Second Malaysia Plan was unveiled. The Dewan Rakyat approved the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill to entrench fundamental guarantees in the Constitution. The Bill placed beyond challenge sensitive issues like citizenship, the national language and the use of

other languages, the special position of the Malays, legitimate interests of non-Malays and sovereignty of the Rulers. The vote was 125 for and 17 against.

The Printing Ordinance of 1948 introduced by the colonial government was revised in 1971. The Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 was passed by Parliament following massive student protests in the early 1970s.



The swearing-in ceremony of The Honourable Tan Sri TemenggongJugah in the House of Representatives on 20.2.1971 (Source: National Archives of Malaysia)

The Year 1972

Traditional weights and measures such as the *dacing, gantang* and *cupak* were to become obsolete when the metric system was adopted over the next 10 years.

The Year 1973

In March, a law requiring motorcyclists and pillion riders to wear crash helmets came into force. Vide the Constitutional Amendment Act No 2 of 1973 Kuala Lumpur became a Federal Territory with effect 1 February 1974. The Act provided for the increase in the number of MPs for some states and allocated 5 seats to the Federal Territory, thereby increasing the membership of the Dewan Rakyat to 154.

By: Kamala M.G. Pillai

**Office of the Deputy Speakers of the House of Representatives,
Parliament Malaysia
29.10.2013**

