

Tun Tan Siew Sin (President from November 1961 to April 1974)



Tun Tan Siew Sin led the MCA and the Malaysian Chinese through the most turbulent period in Malaysia's history. After he took over the reins of the party in 1961 he wasted no time in settling internal squabbles. The MCA under his leadership was given nine key Cabinet portfolios. Then in 1963, Indonesian President Sukarno launched his "Confrontation" against Malaysia and threw the country into a turmoil. Tun Tan asserted his strong leadership in galvanising the Chinese to fight against Indonesia's aggression.

The following year, Tun Tan was appointed the Deputy Chairman of the Alliance. General elections were held and the MCA won 27 of the 33 parliamentary seats. Despite the Confrontation and all forms of sabotages, the Alliance won with a resounding victory in the general elections held on April 25.

In 1968, the MCA set up Koperasi Serbaguna Malaysia (KSM) with the overwhelming support of the Chinese. In the same year, Tan Sri Khaw Kai Boh was given the task of setting up the Tunku Abdul Rahman college. In June, the Government agreed to the setting up of the college and also to provide funding on a dollar-to-dollar basis. On February 24, 1969, The Tunku Abdul Rahman College was formally set up, opening the doors to thousands and thousands of Chinese youths who would otherwise be denied an opportunity to tertiary education. Tun Tan also launched the Cadre Training Camp to provide training to party members.

However, after the May general elections in 1969, Malaysia suffered a great setback with the outbreak of the May 13 riots. The MCA bore the brunt of anti-establishment feelings during the May elections and after the electoral setback, the MCA withdrew from the Cabinet.

An emergency was declared after the May 13 riots which were blamed on provocation by the Opposition parties. The MCA rejoined the Cabinet later. Subsequently, Tun Tan devoted his time and energy to galvanise the Chinese community in working together with other races for a better Malaysia. The Chinese unity movement was launched and mass rallies were held all

over the country. But as the movement grew in momentum, Tun Tan also became the target of attack by those from inside and outside the party who failed to appreciate his good intention.

In August 1971, the MCA held the 20th Delegates Conference when he laid down the guiding principles of MCA's struggles. He stressed the importance of unity, self-reliance and pragmatism and rejected confrontational politics. The establishment of the Tunku Abdul Rahman College, rather than lending support to the proposed Merdeka University, was a testimony of his political wisdom.

It was worth noting that at his time, he was longest serving finance minister in the Commonwealth countries and during his 15-year tenure, he laid the sound financial system which enabled Malaysia to subsequently to take off to become one of the Asian economic miracles.

After his resignation in 1974, he became the Economic Adviser to the Government and Chairman of Sime Darby Berhad.

The former Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak was full of praise of Tun Tan's stewardship in strengthening Malaysia's financial position and in making the ringgit one of the strongest in the world. When he passed away on March 17, 1988, the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman described his death as a great loss to the country. The Tunku also commended his leadership and loyalty to the country and his contribution to the unprecedented prosperity in Malaysia. Tun Tan dedicated the best part of his life to the nation and the people and his biggest desire was to see a prosperous Malaysia where the various communities live in peace and harmony.

1916, May 21	Born to a Baba family in Malacca; the only son to MCA Founder-President Tun Tan Cheng Lock.
1939	Returned from law studies in London to take over the family plantation business.
1941	Worked for the British Information Service Far East Affairs Bureau in New Delhi during the World War II.
1943	Set up Overseas Chinese Society in India together with his father Tun Tan Cheng Lock. He was the secretary of the society.
1945, December	Returned to Malaya and became an assistant councillor of the Malacca Chinese Affairs Council.
1946	Appointed Commissioner of Malacca Town Hall. He married the following year and subsequently had three daughters.
1948	Was appointed member of the Federal Legislature. He held the post for 26 years before stepping down in 1974.
1949	Became active in politics. He was MCA Malacca Division Secretary, MCA Youth Division Chairman and MCA publicity chief.

- 1955 Elected Member of Parliament for Malacca.
- 1957 Minister of Commerce and Industry.
- 1958 Appointed Treasurer of the Alliance with the independence of Malaya.
- 1959 Appointed Minister of Finance.
- 1961,
November
10 Elected President of MCA when acting President Cheah Toon Lock did not seek re-election.
- 1964 Elected Vice-Chairman of the Alliance.
- 1969 Appointed Minister with Special Functions after the May 13 incident when the MCA rejoined the Cabinet. In the same year, he was appointed Minister of Finance with the restoration of Parliamentary democracy. He was also conferred the SSM award by the Yang di Pertuan Agung which carries the title Tun. In the same year, he was conferred an Honorary Doctorate of law by University of Malaya.
- 1974, April
8 resigned as MCA President and Minister of Finance for health reasons. The Central Committee in appreciation of his great contribution made him the an honorary life President and Advisor to the Party.
- 1988, March
17 He died of a heart attack.