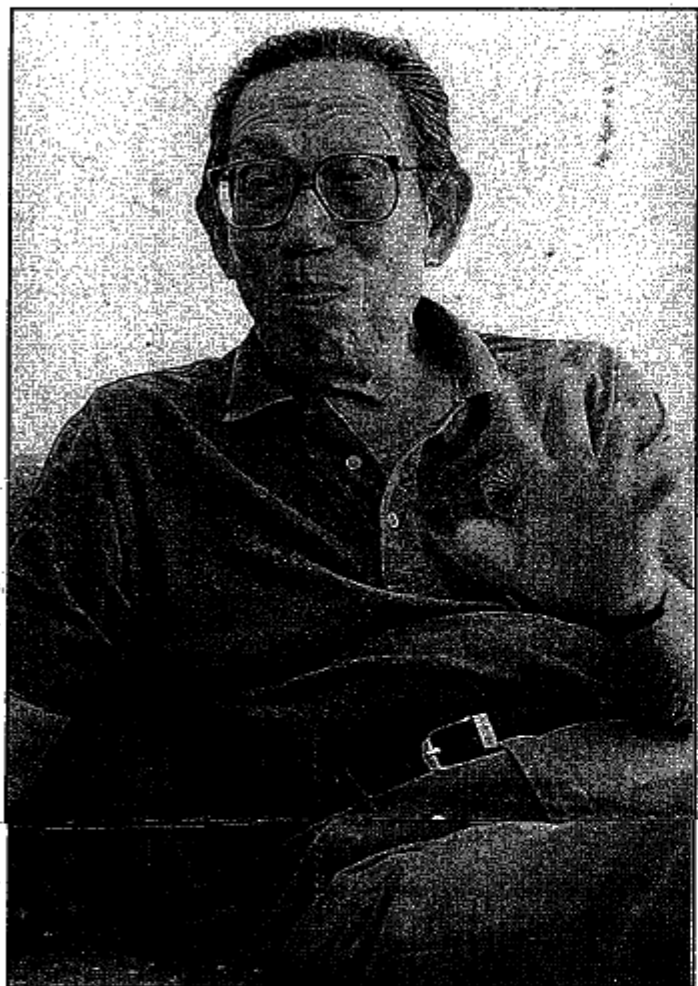


INTERVIEW

Looking back with satisfaction



Former Health director-general Tan Sri Abdul Majid Ismail was thrust into a medical career by the State. But he is glad for all the things he managed to achieve, he tells FELICIA CHONG in the second instalment of his story

WHILE former Health director-general Tan Sri Abdul Majid Ismail comes across as a fun-loving person, it should not suggest that he has no serious objectives in life.

Indeed, he has done his share for society for which he feels the greatest satisfaction. In his own view, a major contribution was the introduction of anti-polio vaccine here during his tenure as director-general of Health from 1971 to 1976.

It was motivated by his sympathy for polio victims who sought his skills as an orthopaedic surgeon. They had come under his scalpel for leg lengthening, joint-fixing and tendon transplant. The anti-polio vaccine programme for newborns brought such cases down dramatically.

Another programme with satisfying results was in malaria control, headed by Tan Sri Dr Raja Ahmad Nordin (who succeeded Majid as Health DG).

The programme brought the yearly figure of 300,000 cases

down to only 3,000. It started in 1964 and the main agent used was dichloroDiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), which has since been banned.

At the same time, Dr Jeswant Singh Sodhi, a fellow Victoria Institution boy, introduced the BCG vaccine against tuberculosis.

"I looked after many patients who suffered from bone and joint TB, but as a result of the programme, there were no more such cases."

Measures such as these which he was instrumental in implementing made him glad he was thrust into the medical career instead of some other that he might have chosen on his own.

He vividly recalls when his fate was sealed. The Raja Uda of Selangor, who was then secretary to the British Resident, summoned Majid to his office along with two other boys - all three were top Malay students.

Without much ado, the Raja Uda pronounced: "Majid, you go to the Medical College in Singapore." The second boy, Mohd

Noor Marahakim, (who would one day become a professor of ophthalmology at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) was also sent to the same college. The third, remembered only as Shamsuri, was to study engineering.

Majid, now 76, recalls being a little sad then, but did not dare protest. He imitates the Raja Uda's pronouncement and declares with mock sobriety: "The oracle hath spoken."

In 1940, he enrolled at the Edward VII College, but his studies were disrupted by the war.

He resumed the course in 1946 and graduated in 1950. He came back to the General Hospital to do his housemanship and in 1953, went to get his fellowship at the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh. When he returned, he became the State Surgeon in Negri Sembilan.

The following year, he went to Liverpool for his Master's in orthopaedic surgery. Upon his return, he became the consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Federation

ENJOYING LIFE... glad that he became a doctor, "the better to help people"



FRIENDLY CONFRONTATION... Singapore and Malaysian leaders at a golf tournament. From right: Tan Abdul Razak; Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew; Tan Sri Abdul Majid and Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong