

Majid - life has been good

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continued his link with the University of Malaya which began in Singapore.

He's proud to be the longest serving member on its council to which he was appointed by Tunku Abdul Rahman upon the move of the university's Kuala Lumpur division across the Causeway in 1959.

"My 28 years of service as council member was without a break from 1959 to 1987," he says.

THE IMR is another institution close to his heart. "I am alive today probably because of a research finding in its laboratory," he says.

He was a young doctor when he contacted scrub typhus caused by a mite carried by rodents. He suspects he was bitten during one of his favourite pursuits - big game hunting.

(He was initiated to hunting by a much older doctor, Dr Abdul Latiff, after whom Jalan Abdul Latiff in Kuala Lumpur was named. Dr Latiff was also the father of the late Datuk Yaacob Latiff, a former mayor of Kuala Lumpur.)

He had high fever and terrible headaches which did not subside even after a week of medication. By divine providence perhaps, an American team from the US Army medical research unit (USAMRU) was doing research on tropical diseases and their cures in IMR.

"They were trying a new medicine called Chloromycetin for scrub typhus. My doctor, a Dr Hardy, asked if I would agree to be a guinea pig.

"What was there to lose? I agreed and within 24 hours, my fever went down."

As a result, Majid never forgot the importance of medical research and made efforts to develop this field. However, there was a dearth of interest in this area among doctors.

To encourage interest, he even introduced an incentive allowance for research scientists (which is paid to this day). Unfortunately, the enticement did not draw many to the field.

Because of the lack of local interest in research, he looked for other ways to bring foreign researchers to do work in IMR which had a 100-year-old history.

One of this he calls a more remarkable coup was to get the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Asia Pacific region office based in Manila to make IMR the research centre for tropical diseases.

Offering IMR to WHO for use

as a research centre and getting it accepted served his objective in tapping the pool of researchers from the world body.

Turning to a leisurely subject, Majid talks about one of his loves - golf. He recalls a most embarrassing moment when he kept Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak waiting at the RSGC while he was snoozing in bed.

"Our game was at seven and at 7.30am, my phone rang and he asked, in a voice which did not hide his irritation, 'Where are you?' I had set my alarm clock to ring at 5.30am but the darn batteries went dead!"

A shame-faced and apologetic Majid turned up later but Tun Razak was hard to appease. "He was rather glum throughout the game, lightening up only at the end. I was forgiven."

Majid's love for golf borders on passion. It sprouted from his caddying days in the Sentul Golf Course.

He may well be one of the earliest local golfers, starting as a member of the Sentul Golf Club after his graduation as a doctor.

Today, he is the chairman of the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Golf And Country Club but he plays most often at the Royal Selangor Golf Club where he has been a member for 35 years. RSGC is also closest to his home in Taman Duta.

It is not surprising then that he has long harboured a desire to develop a golf course. The opportunity came when he was invited to be a partner in the construction and development companies.

The offer came when he was the chairman of the Pantai Medical Centre, which was established jointly by two teams of doctors.

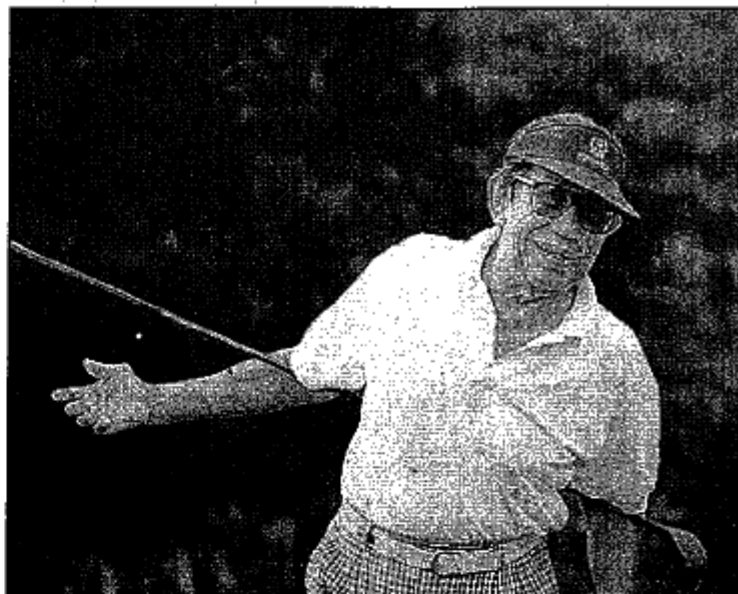
One was a group of doctors from the GH, including Dr Syed Mohd Alhady, Dr Omar Din, Dr Haji Abbas and Majid who were joint owners of the land given by Datuk Harun Idris, the then Selangor Menteri Besar. The other team consisted of Dr Ronnie McCoy and Eddie Yeo who were also venturing out to build a hospital.

He sold his shares in the hospital to fund the Selesa Hillhomes project where as the major shareholder, he became the chairman.

The Selesa Hillhomes property comprises 7.3 hectares of hilly land upon which 700 apartments were built. The Pahang Government later leased a 60.8ha for the golf course in its immediate vicinity.

The concept for Selesa Hillhomes was inspired by a health centre which he saw in Tring, England. So it was built with the objective of a resort in mind. It

EMBARRASSED... late for a golf game with the Prime Minister



FAMILY AFFAIR... Tan Sri Abdul Majid and his wife Khairany, son Aljafri and daughter Elisha in Edinburgh

also sells a three-day, two-night health programme where participants are given tips on healthy living to prevent major illnesses like cardiac diseases, obesity and hypertension.

The property which gives him the most dazzling memory is Alang Sedayu (Gift of Shrubs) which has a *kampung/dusun* environment in Gombak. Although it has shed its exclusive image and is now leased to Asia Overland which runs tours for the more budget-conscious Alang Sedayu used to cater to the rich and famous, including Sultans and political leaders.

Even Crown Prince Akihito of Japan (now the Emperor), who

was a keen biologist, visited the area to study the *meranti* tree.

Indeed, Majid has had a full life. But he has never forgotten his humble beginnings.

He has great admiration and affection for his mother who lived to a ripe old age and passed away in 1996, aged 93.

She became the first *Ibu Mithali* (Ideal Mother) and the first chief of Kaum Ibu of Selangor. His father died of pneumonia during the War when Majid was 23 years old.

"My mother used to sell *nasi lemak* and do tailoring for others to make ends meet. She also taught religious classes.

"Life was hard. I remember the

first home that my mother built after my father passed away and we had to leave the railway quarters. It was in Sentul Pasar and was a shack with only roof and flooring... the walls came later."

After the war, the Government gave extra allowance to scholarship students who had lost their parent(s) during the war. He always managed to send some money back to his mother.

MAJID, at home in a bungalow in Taman Duta where we continued the interview started at Selesa Hillhomes, sits in his lounge with French windows opening to a well-kept garden which he worked on himself.

Gardening is his hobby. Besides palms and other green shrubs, there are also rambutan trees. Luckily for me, the fruit is in season. The branches are heavily laden - which in turn are heavily invaded by ants!

The rambutans are delicious and very *lekan* (a word describing rambutans where the flesh is easily detached from the seed). The trees were bud-grafted from trees owned by a Penang *towkay* "who would not simply give to just anybody".

Pictures of the family - all three generations - are abundantly displayed in his lounge. He has eight grandchildren. There is also a picture of him and his only son Aljafri. Both were wearing robes of the College of Surgeons, Edinburgh. It was taken at a get-together of the college.

"I believe we are the only father-and-son team who are both Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh," he declares proudly.

Prof Aljafri is a cardiac surgeon and is now the head of the Department of Surgery in Universiti Malaya.

He has two daughters - Elisha, a graduate of pharmacology from Monash University and Ellina, a law and social anthropology graduate of University of London.

Sitting back and sipping tea, he reflects with a great measure of gratitude: "I have had a good life.

"I have the Raja Uda to thank for that. I don't regret how things turned out because it has really enabled me to serve the country better."