

Biographical Notes

Tan Sri Dr Lim Swee Aun (3 Sept 1915 – d. 12 Aug 1977) - Medical doctor, politician

Born in Taiping, Malaysia, Lim received his medical education at King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore. Lim was an outstanding scholar and was awarded the Lim Boon Keng Medal for being the top student in 1938, the year he graduated. A keen sportsman, in College, Lim played football, hockey and captained the all-blues rugby team.¹

It was also at medical college that Lim met and fell in love with fellow student, Quek Eng Lan. The couple married in 1938 at the Chinese Church in Prinsep Street, and later had several children: May Lim Meng Eng (b.1939), Evelyn Lim Meng Lim (b.1941), Lim Meng Aun (b.1945) and Lim Meng Hooi (b.1946).²

After graduation, Lim did short work stints in Singapore and Ipoh before returning to his hometown of Taiping. During the Japanese Occupation, it was believed that Lim assisted volunteer forces and supported the Allies. After the war, Lim went into private practice and was known as a dutiful and compassionate doctor. Being civic minded, Lim accepted appointments to Taiping Town Board (1948) and Justice of Peace (1949).³

Lim's entry into politics started with his co-founding of the Perak branch of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and his appointment to the Perak State Executive and Legislative Councils in 1953. Lim rose to prominence within the MCA, serving as National Vice President (1959-1962) and National Deputy President (1962-1969). As part of the MCA, Lim campaigned for citizenship to be given to the Chinese, and encouraged the Chinese to take up citizenship in Malaysia.⁴ Subsequently, Lim stood as the Alliance candidate for the Larut Selatan Constituency in 1959, and won.⁵

Lim was actively involved in the creation of the Federation of Malaysia. He led a delegation to Borneo to form Alliance parties in Sarawak and Sabah that would affiliate themselves with the Federation Alliance.⁶ He was also part of the 1963 Malayan delegation led by Tun Razak to negotiate outstanding issues with Singapore and Brunei regarding their inclusion in the Federation.⁷

On 16 July 1962, the Malaysian Prime Minister (PM) announced a government reshuffle, and the appointment of Lim as Minister of Transport.⁸ In a surprise move, ten days later, Lim was re-assigned to the Ministry of Health.⁹ In October 1962, in yet another Cabinet switch, Dr Lim was appointed to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.¹⁰

As Minister for Trade and Commerce, Lim championed industrialisation and free enterprise in Malaysia. Even as he encouraged overseas investors to set up plants and pioneer industries in Malaysia, he also safeguarded and promoted local manufacturing.¹¹ Lim opened the first motorcar

¹ Lim Swee Hoe, *The Lim family story* (2006), p. 150; "Eve of departure cabinet surprises", *The Straits Times*, 16 July 1962; "He is a Malaysian...", *The Straits Times*, 11 July 1965.

² Lim, *The Lim family story*, pp. 152-155.

³ Lim, *The Lim family story*, pp. 153-157.

⁴ Lim, *The Lim family story*, p. 157.

⁵ Lim, *The Lim family story*, p. 157; "We've done a lot for the Chinese: Lim", *The Straits Times*, 25 April 1964.

⁶ "Dr Lim seeks a Borneo Alliance", *The Straits Times*, 13 Oct 1962.

⁷ "Tengku surprise", *The Straits Times*, 25 June 1963.

⁸ "Eve of departure cabinet surprises", *The Straits Times*, 16 Jul 1962.

⁹ "More surprises", *The Straits Times*, 26 July 1962.

¹⁰ "Cabinet jobs switch today", *The Straits Times*, 10 October 1962.

¹¹ "Free enterprise is best system for Malaysia: Dr Lim", *The Straits Times*, 29 December 1964; "More come", *The Straits Times*, 21 February 1965; "Many 'made in Malaysia' products find ready markets overseas now", *The Straits Times*, 4 December 1965.

assembly plant in Malaysia, Swedish Motor Assemblies Sendirian Berhad, in 1968.¹² He encouraged the modernisation of the rubber industry to compete more effectively with the threat of synthetic alternatives.¹³

Lim also represented Malaysia and its interests at various conferences including the United Nations conference on Trade and Development, and meetings of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE).¹⁴ In 1968, Lim was conferred the title of “Panglima Mangku Negara” in recognition of his distinguished service to the nation in forging international and commercial ties around the world.¹⁵

As a leader in the MCA, Lim was supportive of the college initiated by the party in 1968. Named the Tengku Abdul Rahman College (now known as the Tunku Abdul Rahman University College), the College was eventually opened in 1969.¹⁶

Lim served as Minister of Commerce and Industry till 1969 when he retired from government after losing the Larut Matang Parliamentary seat to Ng Hoe Hun from Gerakan.¹⁷

In 1977, Lim had a heart attack and passed away after a round-the-world trip with his wife.¹⁸

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¹² “Dr Lim to open first motor assembly plant in Malaysia”, *The Straits Times*, 17 February 1968.

¹³ “Dr Lim to replanting officers: modernize industry”, *The Straits Times*, 26 August 1964.

¹⁴ “Lim for Geneva trade talks”, *The Straits Times*, 31 May 1964; “Dr Lim to lead mission to N.Z. talks”, *The Straits Times*, 13 March 1965.

¹⁵ Lim, *The Lim family story*, p. 160.

¹⁶ “It will be known as Tengku Abdul Rahman College”, *The Straits Times*, 12 August 1968; “Notable milestones”, *TARC website*, retrieved from <https://www.tarc.edu.my/tarc-uc/pictorial-milestones-events>.

¹⁷ Lim, *The Lim family story*, p. 162; “The ‘giant killers’ who defeated three cabinet ministers”, *The Straits Times*, 12 May 1969; “Rough passage for the Alliance boat”, *The Straits Times*, 12 May 1969.

¹⁸ Lim, *The Lim family story*, pp. 163-164.