



**An Interview with
DATO' TAJUDIN ALI
“A Man of Transport”**

Name	Dato' Tajudin Ali	Company:	Perak Roadways Bhd.
Date/Time	20 June 2005/1000	Place	8 Jalan Hala Gopeng 20350, Ipoh, Perak
Interviewer	Cdr Ian Anderson		

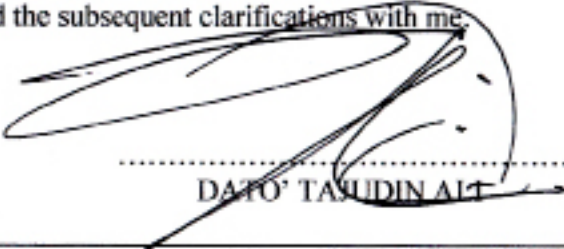
Presented By



www.ipohWorld.org

CERTIFICATION

The original of the following certificate, signed by Dato' Tajudin, is part of the bound master copy of the interview held in the ipohWorld library. Additional photographs have been added to this digital presentation for completeness.

To whom it may concern:	
This is to confirm that the above is an accurate record of the interview of 20 June 2005 and the subsequent clarifications with me.	
 DATO' TAJUDIN ALI	6/7/05 DATE

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Dato' Tajudin Ali - Man of Transport

Unfortunately, Dato' Tajudin Ali and his family have nothing in the way of records, documents or photographs available from the first 45 years or so of his fascinating life, as they were either confiscated or destroyed by successive militant organizations. "Our life has almost always been in danger" he said "first of all the Thais drove us out of our homeland, then the Japanese stole everything we owned and the Communists came next. Consequently everything was lost." This account therefore includes early photographs that are typical of the era in Malaysia, but are not those from the family albums.



Dato' Tajudin Ali

Born in 1922 in Batu Kurau, Perak, and the youngest of 7 children (3 girls and 4 boys) young Tajudin Ali was brought up in difficult times for his grandfather, father (Ali bin Pandak), mother (Wan Selamah bt Wan Mohamed Salleh) and eldest siblings had been forced by war to move from their ancestral home in the "Kingdom of Pattani", Southern Thailand. "Pushed out by the Thais", as Tajudin put it, the family moved south to the Jungles around Taiping and eventually settled in Batu Kurau. The family was penniless and with no means of making money as they had left all their belongings behind in their flight to safety. "I would like to return to my ancestral home one day," said Dato' Tajudin wistfully, "but even now it is not safe as they are still fighting their war there. I wish the world leaders like President Bush and Prime Minister Blair would do something to stop all this violence and let people live in peace in their ancestral homes. In Pattani alone they have been losing lives for over a century and still are."

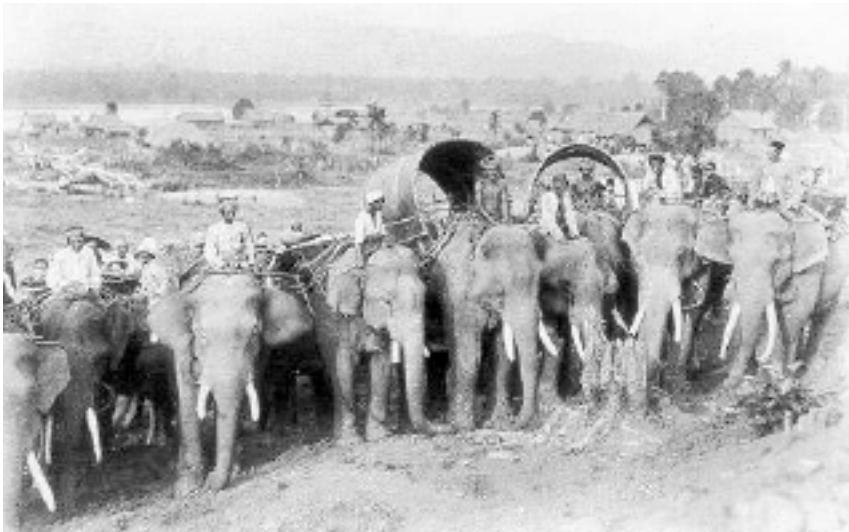
Once settled in Batu Kurau, the family became small-time farmers, carving out the jungle in an effort to grow sufficient crops to feed themselves and also did whatever else they could to make a living. It was not long after they arrived however that some of the Scottish miners in the area suggested that Tajudin's father, Ali Pandak, with his Thai upbringing, try to train wild elephants to provide transportation for the tin from the mines, which had never been done before in the area although earlier considerable numbers of elephants had been used by government and royalty for personal transport.



Typical Bullock Cart, Ferrying Latex to the Factory

However, as did the rubber and other industries, at that time the miners around Batu Kurau had to rely on the traditional, but entirely unsuitable bullock carts to transport their ore and there were not even enough of those. Clearly an entrepreneur, Ali Pandak took up the idea and took off to the jungle with his friends to catch wild elephants and bring them home for training.

Once the first was captured and trained, it was easy to use this animal to catch more and when they were safely tethered in Batu Kurau, the elephants were trained over a period of 5 to 6 months by Tajudin's father and friends. Before too long an elephant transport company was in business. This was such a successful 'all-Malay' enterprise that the numbers of elephants rose to as many as 27, each with their own Malay Mahout. This was the largest number of elephants, owned by one person, anywhere in the country at that time. It was no surprise therefore that young Tajudin learnt to deal with elephants almost as soon as he could walk and by the age of 5 had his favourite beast, Mek who was very friendly and obedient. Dato' fondly recalled that with one word from him "Trom," Mek would slowly lower his body until he hit the ground like an earthquake. At that stage it was simple for him to hold on to Mek's ear and climb up on the animals back in his sarong. Mek would then rise and from time to time they would go off to work. Consequently from 5 to 12 years old Tajudin was constantly with the elephants and if a Mahout was absent he would take his place delivering people to the mines, or on most occasions collecting and transporting tin to the smelter. Dato' smiled as he remembered that his father paid him for this work and he laughed when asked if he could drive an elephant today, "Easy" he replied. "When you get to know them they are very friendly and intelligent animals."



Elephants Transporting Tin in the Kinta Valley

Although some other elephant transports were available at that time, it seems that Ali Pandak almost had a monopoly and he served mines all around Taiping and down the Kinta Valley to the Ipoh area. "My father became a very rich man" Dato' recalled. "The government at that time also had a few elephants," he said, "very few, for transporting local government officers to outlying districts and the

Sultan also had some and so was very friendly with my family as he knew that my father had a lot of experience with elephants." "Father always made sure that our elephants had good food, plenty of water and he even let them take a holiday!" The business continued through all the ups and downs of the tin mining industry and only ended due to the Japanese invasion. "The Japanese were very cruel" said Dato'. "Elephants need looking after, lots of food and water and space in secondary jungle." "When the war came to Malaya, there was no food allowed for the elephants and they had to be set loose to fend for themselves and the business therefore had to close down."

But long before that in 1933, at age 11 Tajuddin had left the elephants and gone off to King Edward's School, the most prestigious education establishment in Taiping. At that time there were some 1,500 students in the school and our Dato' played centre-forward in the school football team and also enjoyed hockey. He fondly remembers the headmaster, a Scotsman, who believed that no student of his should need tuition outside school and if they did it was only because they were not paying attention in class. Consequently it was morning school, followed by lunch and a free afternoon or a school project as tuition was forbidden. But for this young student the headmaster said, "Spend your free time around the Police headquarters and report what you hear, there is always a lot going on there." His schooling was also arranged by that same headmaster, as a scholarship and as part of that he was given 8 dollars a month for his expenses.

Another extra-curricular activity was to join the Scouts. “In order to be accepted into the Scouts in those days you had to have a savings book with 10 dollars in it. Why 10 dollars I don’t know, but when I showed mine it had 1,350 dollars in it and they were surprised and wondered how a young boy could have so much.” Dato’ laughed, “My father was a very rich man with his elephants business.” He said.

After passing the School Secondary Examination at age 17 and being well-known to the local police officers and British Inspectors, who were very powerful and with whom he had spent many hours, he was enlisted as Police recruit number 3414 and sent to the training depot for what was expected to be one year. However, in 1939, after about 6 weeks he was given special advancement and sent to a division known as CIA. His pay for this was 26 dollars a month. This was very good for his father’s business for with a policeman in the family nobody would give them any trouble.

Around this time and encouraged by his Scottish miner friends, Tajudin started to invest in mining land in Tanjung Tualang, in small pockets of some 15 acres at a time and he continued to do this until, by Merdeka Day, he had accumulated 2,400 acres. All of this land was bought, rather than given by the government, and he has much to thank his father for, as it was the elephant business and the money and education that came to him because of it that allowed him to do this. He still owns some of this land today. At the height of his mining operations he had 4 dredges working the mines there.



Typical Kinta Valley Tin Dredge

But of course, in December 1941, the Japanese invaded Malaya and by 11th January 1942 had captured Kuala Lumpur. Immediately the military and police still in Malaya were rounded up and the CIA division was one of the early targets of the Japanese. At that time there were many “Fifth Columnists” who were working on the Japanese side and providing details of local people wanted for questioning by the Japanese. “It was a dangerous time.” However, Officer Tajudin had driven south to Seremban, on his newly issued service motorbike, before the Japanese caught him. He vividly remembers his British Commander saying to him as the latter prepared to leave for Singapore, “Your father is leaving you and you will soon have a new stepfather (the Japanese).” He felt very let down by the British at that time.

After finding out that all his CIA colleagues had been arrested by the Japanese, Police Officer Tajudin took to the Jungle near Bentong in Pahang, where he stayed for some 4 months until things had become quieter and then he slowly made his way back to Batu Kurau and then Taiping. Here the Japanese didn’t arrest him, but “seemed to take a liking to me,” and insisted that he went to the Japanese College and it was there he learnt to speak their language. On completion of this training he was sent to Selama and Larut Matang by the Japanese as the Rations officer, taking responsibility for the distribution of rice, delivered by Japanese Lorries and for the bags of “Banana Notes” (local Japanese currency). In this role he became the area Chief of the Supply Depot managing consignments of 4 or 5 Lorries at a time. Surprisingly in one way, the local people did not object to the ex-policeman working with the Japanese, but actually welcomed his role in sharing out the rice fairly whenever it was available.

After the war was over and the British returned to Malaya, there were still Japanese hiding out in the jungle and several had actually joined the Communists and were fighting with them. “One day the District Officer said “Tajudin go to the villages and speak out to the Japanese still hiding in the Jungle. Tell them they have nothing to be afraid of”, “And so I did. That was a relief to the local people who were still afraid of the Japanese in the jungle and of course a great relief to many of the Japanese as well.”

But with the war over it was time to start the mining project in earnest and for the next 5 years much of Dato’ Tajudin’s efforts were in this direction. But in 1948 life in the mining areas and jungles became very dangerous and grenades in Perak towns like Ipoh was not uncommon. In 1949 there was a very welcome gift from the outgoing District Officer - two vehicle permits for two new Morris Oxford cars. “Of course in those days you could not pop in to Taiping or Ipoh, but had to collect the vehicles at Bukit Timah, Singapore, and drive them back to Perak. So one of my brothers and I went to collect them. They were very heavy and dependable cars.”



This 1949 Morris Oxford is NOT the Original Vehicle,

workers safely to the dredges every day, in 1950, entrepreneur Tajudin bought a bus to transport miners from their homes to the dredge head as this was the safest way to avoid the Communists. “Nobody in those days was prepared to walk or cycle to work anymore as there had been too many incidents of “cold blooded murder” by the Communists.” This first bus was imported from the Bedford factory in England at a cost of 40,000 Malayan dollars (his life savings). But having a bus did not mean that you could run a bus service as a government permit had to be obtained from the British Administration supported by the local Malay officers and they, the authorities, “did not believe that Malays could run a business properly.” Nonetheless being well known at many levels and with the help of the “British District Officer, who at that time was very high ranking and very powerful”, a permit was eventually granted and a new business, named after father Ali and his elephants, was born. ‘Gajah Transport’ was in business with one route from Tanjung Tualang to Tronoh.

Encouraged by his circle of good mining friends, many of whom were again Scots and concerned about getting their



This 1949 Bedford Bus is NOT the Original Vehicle, but almost identical to it.

The Gajah Transport enterprise with only one bus meant that so many people were relying on it that it had to be kept going. And so “day or night”, if the bus broke down then the owner had to go out to repair it “wherever it was and whether Communists were around or not.” Similarly if a driver was sick or failed to show up it was the owner who had to drive the bus and “from time to time the Communists would also take a ride.” But throughout the emergency there were never any Communist problems for this Transport Company and one night time trip to the broken down bus in

the jungle came to the notice of the District Officer. “One day a big size policeman came to my door, knocked the door and said ‘Tajudin, the District Officer wants to see you tomorrow.’ “What for?” I said, “I have done nothing wrong.”

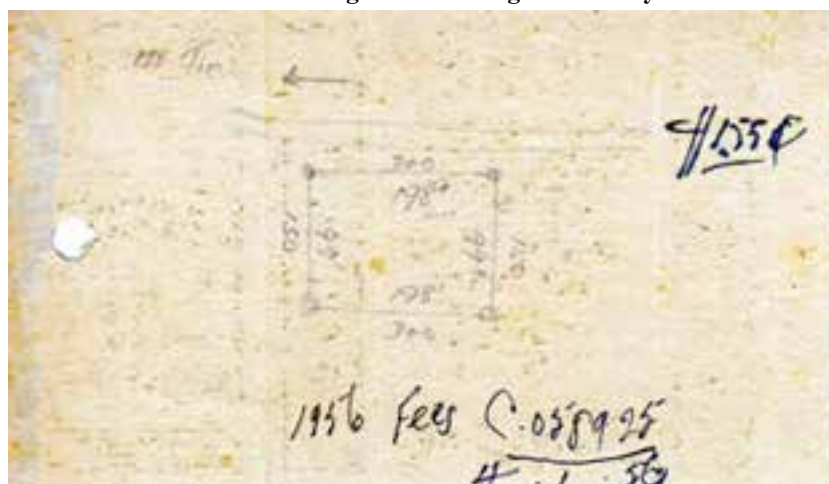
“Then, early in the morning, I was already there at the District Officer’s house.” “What happened to you?” the District Officer said. “What happened to me?” I said. “People say you are very friendly with the Communists”, he said. “You manage to go out into the jungle alone and never have any trouble. How could you not be harmed out there on your own?” I replied, “You think I am a Communist, don’t you know I support the government; Communists also use my bus you know.” The District Officer then said “if you are not Communist then you are a Communist sympathizer.” Dato’ replied “I just give service to the people. I was trained by the Scottish.” There the conversation ended.

“You see, I was providing a public service and the service had to run, consequently I had to go out and do whatever was necessary. I was simply doing my duty.”

The Bedford bus did well, but in 1954, with a second bus, the Company changed its name to ‘Perak Roadways’ with the objective of going nationwide. In 1957 a one-pump petrol filling station was built in Tanjung Tualang to provide fuel and service for the buses, in association with the old Standard-Vacuum Oil Company, now part of the Esso/Exxon Oil Company. A fascinating aspect of this small project is the 1956 cigarette packet (Rough Rider from W D & H O Wills) which remains in the company files and on the reverse has the first sketch plan of the filling station drawn by Dato’ Tajudin himself and showing the date, 4th January 1956, on its reverse, 49 years ago. Truly designed ‘on the back of a fag packet’ as the British used to say.



The back of a “fag” Packet design 4 January 1956



Transport permits were still difficult to get and new routes came slowly, but in 1968 there was a significant breakthrough, new routes were added and on 22 February 1973 there was a ceremony officiated by Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, in the Ipoh Town hall to mark further expansion. “I still have the photographs of that important day” said the Dato’, smiling.



Tun Abdul Razak presides at the opening of the new bus station 22 February 1973 at Ipoh Town Hall

Today, 60 employees work for the company; they have 40 buses and ply seven routes in Perak. The 82 year-young owner and a father of five boys and four girls, still goes to the office every day and two of his offspring work with him in Perak Roadways, son Amirudin being the Executive Director and a qualified mining engineer who used to work in government service. “I asked him to come and help me with Roadways, but the others are scattered far and wide” he said, “although all of them have worked in government service at some time.” However, in parallel with his mining and transportation businesses, our entrepreneur was also interested in Politics (“You know about my secrets too”, he said when asked about this part of his life.) and in 1946 was a founder member of UMNO, along with Tun Abdul Razak (later Prime Minister) and many other famous Malays and this interest in politics has continued since then. In 1955 he was elected to the Perak State Assembly (EXCO) as the first State Executive for Kinta District. This election success probably came about from his work with the Police, “I often did social work while I was serving in the Police” he said, “and consequently became well known to the people.”

The following story is one that clearly sticks in Dato’ Tajudin’s mind and is a good example of his social work and which clearly demonstrates his concern for the local people. He tells the story thus:

“In 1954, much later than the founding of UMNO, one evening around 6.30pm and just before evening prayers, a small group of village people were gathered outside the mosque in Kampong Malayu Batu 8 (on the road to Batu Gajah) when a Punjabi taxi ran into a local girl. A few of the crowd rushed to help the girl, but most of the men went for the Punjabi and sadly, probably not deliberately, beat him to death. It was a terrible tragedy”, he said. “When the District Officer, Mr. Creer, found out about the incident, he was very angry and demanded that the culprit be given up to him.” “I want to know whose hand delivered the blow that killed that man”, demanded the District Officer. But nobody in the village would either give up the name of the killer, or admit their own guilt. “The government couldn’t do anything. The District Officer was very, very mad with me (he was Scottish you know) and said “the killer must be apprehended. Consequently the District Officer ordered that all food supplies be stopped to the village. There was no rice, sugar, flour or any other food to be allowed in the village “until the culprit is found.” This very severe punishment soon caused major problems for the village, particularly the young children. “Babies and the old fell sick and were in danger of dying from malnutrition. The people were starving. So three of the villagers came to see me and asked for help. Leave it to me, I have a plan, I said.”

“I could not stand by and watch this happen”, said Dato’ Tajudin “and so I paid the lorry driver out of my own pocket, in advance, to deliver food. I then went to see the District Officer, my friend, and told him that if he did not relent and allow food into the village I would take matters into my own hands, he must release food to the village and if he didn’t I would continue to pay for it myself as I had already done.” I said you will be ashamed if the children die because of your action. You are being unfair by punishing everybody for the behaviour of one or two people. There may not have been just one hand that killed the man; it may have been an accident rather than a deliberate act. If you continue with this punishment it could turn into a lynching. On seeing how determined I was, he gave in and issued the order to deliver the food normally. The culprit was never found, but I became a hero, a very great man in the eyes of the people and the following year there was an election. I stood for the election and won with a huge majority of 24,000. Later the Scottish District Officer, Mr. Creer admitted his mistake.”

Clearly Dato’ Tajudin is a kind man who uses his money wisely. “Money comes from Allah.” He said.



Lord Attlee

From 1955 for the next 25 years, Dato’ Tajudin was firmly involved in politics. “I look back at this as the most colourful years of my life,” he said. “In 1955 I represented our Government for the Commonwealth Countries Parliamentary meeting in Australia and had the great honour to address the Australian Parliament in Canberra. It was there that some of the great politicians of the world gathered together and I was privileged to be with them. They came from Britain, Canada, South Africa, West Indies, India, Pakistan, New Zealand and more,” he recalled, “I was very lucky there to have met the great and distinguished politician, the late Lord Clement Attlee indeed we became very friendly there. I was then 34 years old and he called me Son, as he was already twice my age”. At several important meetings we worked together and often traveled in the same official car.”

“There were many other famous politicians at this meeting, but the second one that stands out in my memory is the Honourable Mr. Ian Smith, from Rhodesia. To me”, Dato’ continued, “he was a shrewd and intelligent statesman but it was a sad moment when the black politicians from the Commonwealth and Ian Smith got into an open argument across the table. But one thing that stuck in my mind was how well all the Africans spoke English. Ian Smith too became very close to me as the meetings progressed and after we returned home we corresponded with each other for some time. However, some years back his letters stopped coming. I believe he has given up politics now.”



Ian Smith



Sir Robert Menzies

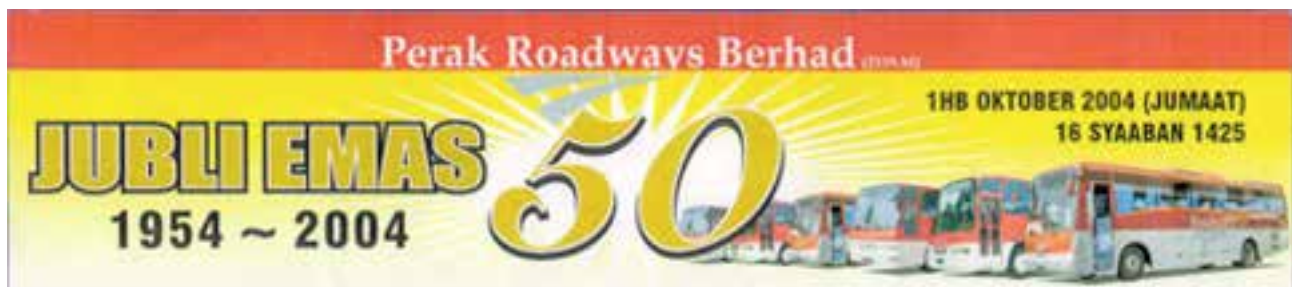
After a brief pause, Dato’ Tajudin continued, “Outside of the political meetings, my fondest memory is of the late Sir Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia and his wife Dame Pattie Menzies who were too kind to me. A lovely couple, who I believe were married for 58 years; they took me to many cities across the continent of Australia. We traveled in their private jet plane and once we also flew, in their helicopter, to the interesting resort and National Park in the Snowy Mountain, South West of Sydney. That was a wonderful experience for a young and brand new elected politician from Malaysia. To me, the world’s best public orator was Sir Robert Menzies. Second place I would give to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore.”

When asked about other overseas duties, Dato' replied, "I was also lucky to travel to Taiwan soon after my trip to Australia. This was again representing our government and I was fortunate to be able too meet and talk to The President of the Republic of China (ROC), General Chiang Kai-Shek. I went back again to Taiwan later on and flew to another of their islands which was very heavily fortified underground. One other trip I remember well was a visit to the, newly Communist, Peoples Republic of China. This was an unusual trip as people from our country did not visit there because of their links with the Communist Party of Malaya, with whom we were fighting under the Emergency. While I was not able to meet any of the senior members of the Communist Party, I did have a good look round and my main memory is that their people were in bad shape. In those days we had very few Parliamentarians and there was plenty of work to do." he mused.



Chiang Kai Shek

Although Dato' Tajudin only served one, 5-year term in office, he continued to serve his country, officially, in politics for 25 years and today is the Chief Veteran of UMNO in Malaysia.



The year 2004 saw the 50th anniversary of Perak Roadways, which in January 1978 had converted to a Public Company. In those 50 years from 1954 and the arrival of their second bus, the company has expanded, new projects have been taken on and new ventures started. Today Perak Roadways has many strings to its bow. The tin mining land is mostly turned into oil palm plantations, although the astute entrepreneur Tajudin reminded me "My tin price is still going up." On top of that there is the Dato' Tajudin Ali building in Jalan Kidd, built in 1973, sales of the national motorcycle through Modenas and several construction projects completed or underway. Remember those government officers back in 1950 who Dato' Tajudin said "did not believe that Malays could run a business properly." Clearly they misjudged the style and perseverance of one young Tajudin Ali who has proved them entirely wrong.



The Tanjung Tualang Petrol Station in 2004



A Perak Roadways Modenas Outlet in 2004

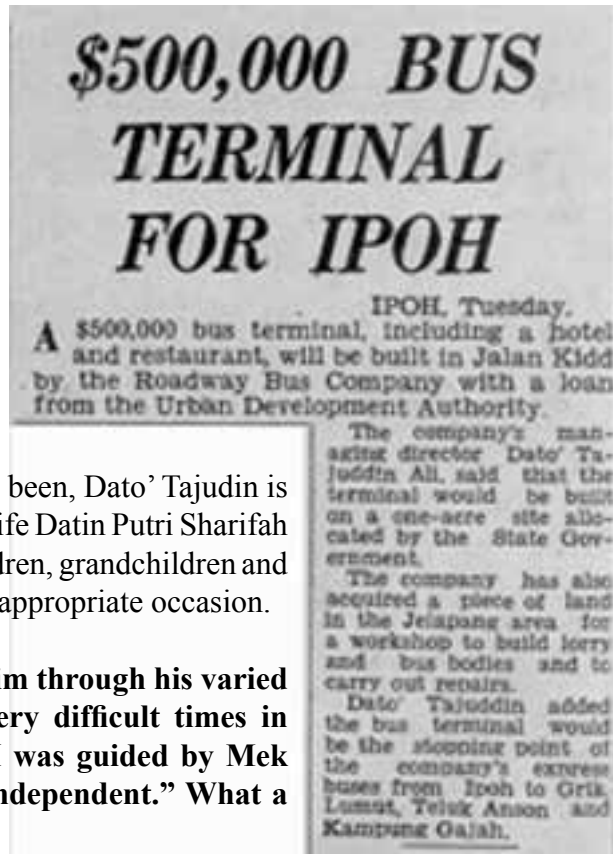


A Perak Roadways Housing Development

Still socially very active, as he has always been, Dato' Tajudin is often seen at functions and celebrations with his wife Datin Putri Sharifah Megat Abdul, and never fails to remember his children, grandchildren and employees whenever there is a festival or any an appropriate occasion.

When asked who or what had guided him through his varied and successful life, which started in those very difficult times in Batu Kurau, Dato' Tajudin replied "I think I was guided by Mek (the elephant) who was always friendly, but independent." What a fascinating thought!

Cutting from The New Straits Times, 1973



The Dato' Tajudin Ali Building in 2004

A Trip Down Memory Lane



DOWN MEMORY LANE: Tajudin, his wife Datin Puteri Sharifah Megat Abdul Rahman and son Amiruddin looking at some old photographs of Perak Roadways. (New Straits Times)



SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS: Tajudin with two of his buses at the Perak Roadways terminal near Medan Kidd, Ipoh. (New Straits Times)

Ketibaan Allahyarham Tun Abdul Razak, Perdana Menteri Malaysia dan Toh Puan Rahah ke majlis perasmian Laluan Bas Perak Roadways Bhd bertempat di 'Ipoh Town Hall'.



Tarikh : 22 Februari 1973

Tun Abdul Razak arrives in Ipoh

Perak Roadways Berhad


GOLDEN JUBILEE

50

1954 - 2004

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Perak Roadways Berhad


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Congratulations



At Home - Datin Puteri Sharifah Megat Abdul Rahman



Entertaining the Grandchildren



Arrival at the Office

And So To Conclude - The Story in a Nutshell

From elephants to buses

■ By M. Hamzah Jamaludin

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IPOH: Riding atop one of his father's elephants, the 12-year-old dreamed of one day having his own transportation company.

Seventy years and much work later, Datuk Tajudin Ali is a prominent name in the business, owning one of the biggest transportation companies in Perak.

It took sheer determination and hard work to prove in more ways than one that he is his father's son.

"I was so interested in my father's business that I spent most of my time following him in the early days," said the Batu Kurau-born Tajudin, who is now 82.

In the 1930s, his father, Ali Pandak, was a successful businessman in northern Perak, supplying elephants to transport tin ore and workers in the tin-rich area.

Tajudin said his father knew every aspect of the business.

"He was the one who caught the wild elephants, and once there were 27 elephants at our home in Batu Kurau," said the youngest of nine siblings.

"Instead of having a herd of elephants, I have a fleet of 40 buses," said Tajudin.

He began school in the 1930s before joining the British police force in 1940.

When the Japanese came in 1941, he fled to Bentong, Pahang.

He returned to Batu Kurau a year later, and to his surprise, the Japanese appointed him "Rations Officer", distributing food to the public in Larut Matang and Solama district.

Tajudin's first foray into business was in 1945 when he joined the tin mining industry, which was the most lucrative industry that time.

But his desire to have his own transportation company was so great that he decided, after much deliberation, to buy his first Bedford bus from England in 1950.

"I forked out my life savings of RM40,000 to buy the brand new bus," he said.

In memory of his father's transport business, he named his company "Gajah Transport". Later that year, he bought another bus to cater to the increasing demand along the Tanjung Tualang-Sungai Durian route in Batu Gajah.

Unfortunately, the only route the company served was infested by communist terrorists.

"There were times I had to take over the wheel when the drivers refused to do so, especially when bandit (communist) activities were at their peak.

"Once, my conductor peed in his pants when a group of bandits hopped onto our



SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS:

bus."

Nevertheless, Tajudin said, his company continued plying the route.

His company later changed its name to Perak Roadways Berhad in 1954, and was later allowed to extend its services to Malim Nawar and Kampung Gajah.

In 1968, the company was given another two routes — Ipoh-Lumut and Ipoh-Grik — at a ceremony officiated by Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak at Ipoh Town Hall on Feb 22, 1973.

"I still keep a photograph of Tun Razak and Toh Puan Rahah taken on that important day," said Tajudin, who was an Umno pioneer and the first State Assemblyman of Kinta in Perak.

With a staff of 60, the company now has branch offices in Medan Gopeng, Lumut, Grik, Shah Alam, Kota Baru in Kelantan and Betong in Thailand.

By M. Hamzah Jamaludin of the New Straits Times