Datuk Sir Ernest Emmanuel Clough Thuraisingham or E.E.C. Thuraisingham was the first local Member (Minister) for Education in the Communities Liaison Committee formed to build communal fraternity in British-rulled Malaya, from 1951 – 1955. He was also the first Asian chairman of the Selangor Turf Club and he was one of the few people to receive a knighthood from Her Royal Highness, Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom on 12th July 1955, for his services to Malayan education.

Better known by his last two names, Clough Thuraisingham’s passion to do the best for Malaya was matched only by his love of horse racing and his large American car, a red Chevrolet Impala. He was also popularly known in the horse racing fraternity as “The Dato”. His dream was to see a united Malaya and stood for racial equality. Thuraisingham was born in Taiping (Perak) on 28th August 1898. He was the second son and child among five children of Kasinathar and Meenachi Clough.

After graduating in December 1922 with a BA degree in Law and Political Economy at Cambridge University, and in order to practice law, Thuraisingham enrolled and studied for the Bar Examinations at Middle Temple, one of the Inns of Court in London and became a Barrister-at-Law in 1924. Thuraisingham played soccer, tennis and hockey at Cambridge and later played soccer semi-professionally with the Tylehurst-on-Thames Soccer Team in the Berkshire Soccer League.

Urged by his father, Kasinathar Clough, Thuraisingham set up a legal practice in Singapore in 1925. He practiced law in a partnership with M.V. Pillai and Charles Peng Siong Wong, another Cambridge lawyer. Being so close to Johore meant that he could also manage his father’s large rubber estate in Skudai across the causeway as his parents and siblings had moved back to Jaffna in Sri Lanka by then.

Thuraisingham, while at Cambridge, married Ethel Mary Huggins in December 1920 and they had twin girls, Rani and Joan. Their marriage was a sad one because it was difficult for a Ceylonese Barrister to practice law in England at that time and, if they returned, difficult for an English woman married to a Ceylonese lawyer in Colonial Malaya. So they reluctantly parted, Thuraisingham returning to Malaya in 1925. Later Thuraisingham married Pearl Sayampanathan, a teacher at St. Mary’s School for Girls, Kuala Lumpur. He met her at a friend’s house in Singapore in 1929. Later with the imminent Japanese occupation of Singapore, Thuraisingham then moved with Pearl to Kuala Lumpur in 1942 and set up home at 7B Treacher Road. He had three children with Pearl - Balendra, Patmalar and Thevendra.

Pearl's death in 1947 from a medical mishap devastated him. This happened at a time when the politics of race was complicating the vision of Dato’ Onn for an independent multiracial Malaya. Typically, Thuraisingham managed to juggle family life with the many demands of his political endeavours and legal career.
Sometime later Thuraisingham married Thayamany Muthuvelu, a widow with a daughter Gowri, and between them they had three children - Raja, Chandramani and Meenachi. Together they raised seven children in a house often filled with visiting relatives, friends and political allies. Datin Lady Thayamany Thuraisingham was a devoted wife to Dato Thuraisingham. She also nursed him lovingly during his ailing years at their home in Bukit Travers. Thuraisingham loved horse riding and horse racing. He owned a stable of race horses which captured the imagination of the racing public. Sporting Gesture the First won the Selangor Turf Club (STC) Class 1 Division 1 Gold Vase in 1952.

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Dato’ Vijay Eswaran, born on Oct 7, 1960, is an leading Malaysian entrepreneur who went against all odds to build a global organisation in a relatively short span of 13 years. Having grown up all over Malaysia in a family steeped in culture, with a youth leader for a father and teacher for a mother, his was an upbringing rich in human values, spirituality, literature and culture.

Dato’ Vijay’s father, Mr. Vijayaratnam, served the Malaysian Government in the Ministry of Labour for 28 years. Having an innate instinct for the welfare of his brethren in the Indian community, he became active in youth empowerment initiatives in Malaysia and founded the Malaysian Hindu Youth Organisation that recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. His mother, Mrs. Pushpavathy Chinniah, was a teacher who had a profound influence on him spiritually.

As a young student, Vijay Eswaran moved to UK to pursue a tertiary education and eventually moved to the United Students, initially for an MBA, but stayed on to work in leading technology companies. This also included a stint in Canada. After 13 years in the west, he returned to Asia wanting to build something that was not just a business, but an opportunity to change lives.

A pioneer, his deep spiritual foundation in every sphere of life, including his business enterprise, has helped him rise far above the rest in the vast commercial domain of the modern world. It is his spiritual anchor that has made him become an exceptional business leader. While other entrepreneurs try to weather economic storms, Dato’ Vijay’s tenacity and drive have propelled him ahead and helped him achieve his dream.

By 1998, with a strong team of like-minded individuals of diverse nationalities and expertise behind him, he set up the company that eventually grew into the QI Group, which today is a multi-business conglomerate with its headquarters in Hong Kong and a presence in over 30 countries. With interests in telecommunications, watch-making, banking and finance, direct
sales, hotels and resorts, travel, wellness and lifestyle, the QI Group has steadily expanded across South East Asia, UK and Europe.

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Jethanand Utumal Valiram (J.U. Valiram) is Chairman of Valiram Group, the region’s leading luxury goods retailer and travel-retail specialist.

The Valiram Group was established in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1935, originally specialising in the textile trade. Today, the Valiram Group is Southeast Asia’s leading luxury goods and travel-retail specialist with corporate headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and regional offices in Singapore, Jakarta and Sydney. Creating exceptional retail environments and luxurious shopping experiences is the hallmark of the Group. Valiram continues to bring to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia iconic luxury brands as well as cutting-edge retail concepts in the domestic and travel-retail arena.

J.U. Valiram took over the Valiram-owned family business from his father in 1957 and continued to expand the Valiram Group focusing on general trading of textile related products across the region. The business continued to strengthen and in 1986, under Mr Valiram’s stewardship, the company began to diversify and a Textile Raw-Material Division was created. Mr Valiram took this niche opportunity in support of the local textile materials industry and focused on the fabric and garment re-export business.

In late 1996, coupled with Mr Valiram’s entrepreneurial zeal and foresight, and together with his three sons - Sharan, Ashvin & Mukesh, provided the impetus for the company in seeing the transformation of Valiram Group expand from its traditional textiles business to opening its first retail store at the domestic terminal at Subang International Airport. This was the first ever fabric store ever retailed at an airport in the world. This venture proved successful in garnering the commitment of many global luxury brands as the Group opened several new concessions at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

Following its successful retail openings at KLIA, Mr J. U. Valiram was instrumental in providing overall strategic counsel to the Directors of Valiram Group as Valiram Group continued its retail expansion downtown Kuala Lumpur with the openings of several exclusive “new and first to market brands” in Malaysia namely Coach, Jimmy Choo, IWC Schaffhausen, Shanghai Tang, Tumi, Michael Kors, Victoria’s Secret, Godiva, Charles & Keith and Pedro among others. Growing from strength to strength, Valiram Group was the first Malaysian company to have won the bid for the main and hotly contested Fashion Concession at Changi International Airport beating other renowned global retail players. From the successful foray into
downtown Malaysia and Singapore, Valiram then expanded to Indonesia and Australia and of recent to Macau, China.

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Mr. Benedict Ponniah was born on the 11th of January, 1915, in Klang, Selangor, Federated Malay States (FMS) and was the 2nd son of Mr. A.B. Ponniah and Mrs. Victoria Ponniah of Seremban. He obtained his Queen’s Scholarship in the year 1934 at St. John’s Institution in Selangor, Malaya. He was the only one in 1934 to be awarded the scholarship from all the candidates in Malaya and the Straits Settlements.

He commenced his Primary Education at the Anglo-Chinese School in Klang from 1921-1927. He furthered his Secondary Education, firstly, at St. Paul’s Institution Seremban from 1927-1933, where he passed his Senior Cambridge with Honours and obtained a 1st place in the Religious Knowledge Examination among all Catholic Schools in Malaya and secondly at St. John’s Institution, Kuala Lumpur from 1933-1935, where he had already distinguished himself in the local sports field. He captained both the St John’s Institution and St Paul’s Institution cricket teams, played hockey for the Negri Sembilan Tamils and soccer for St. John’s Institution. As a bowler of average standard he took 100 wickets in one season and was selected to play for the Combined Schools of Selangor Club.

He sat for the Queens’ Scholarship Examination while at St. John’s Institution in 1934 and was the only person to obtain the Queens’ Scholarship among all the candidates in Malaya and the Straits Settlement. To become a Queen’s Scholar, one really had to excel academically. The qualifying examination was offered to all Citizens of the Commonwealth who satisfied a pre qualification requirement. Apparently a total of 2 scholarships were offered for Malaya and the Straits Settlement provided the candidates qualify.

Mr. Benedict Ponniah joined St. John’s College, Cambridge in 1935. At Cambridge, he played hockey for the Asiatic Students of the University and toured Belgium. He represented St. John’s at Badminton and his College was the Badminton Champions of the University. The other two representatives from St. John’s College were badminton stars, namely C.J. Wee of Penang and K.R.France. He also played cricket for his College and one of his associates in cricket was Bruce Yardley, an All England player. He was also the Honourable Secretary of the Long Vacation Term cricket team of St. John’s College. He was responsible for organizing a Malayan Society at Cambridge in 1937 and was its first President.

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