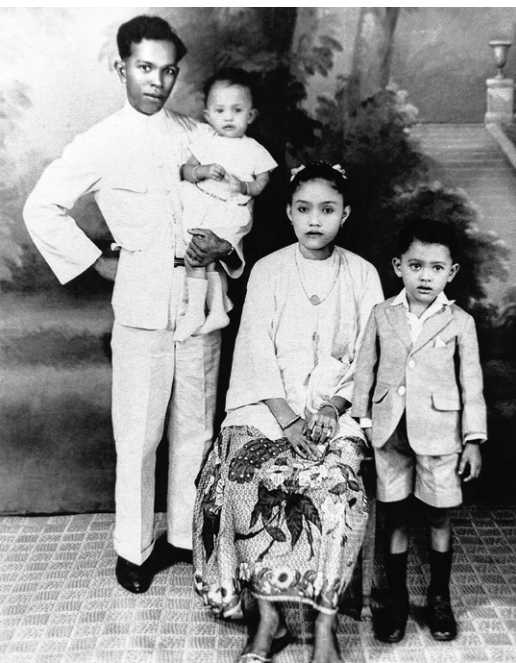


Pioneer minister



A young Othman Wok (right) with his parents Wok Ahmad and Embon Mohd, and sister Mariam, in 1928.

Oct 8, 1924 Born the first of two children, and only son, of school principal Wok Ahmad and housewife Embon Mohd. He is a direct descendant of Singapore's original settlers, the orang laut (Malay for sea gypsies).

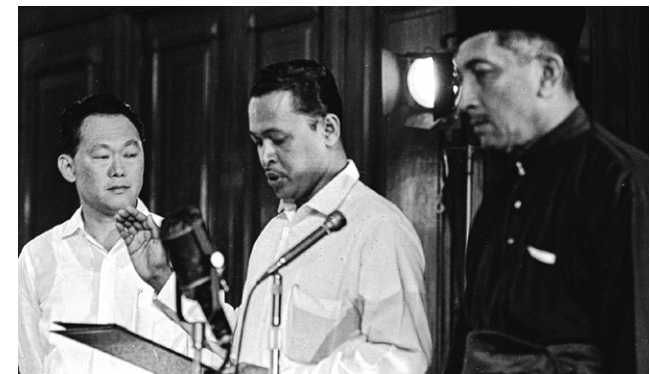
1938-1941 Studies at Raffles Institution. On Dec 8, 1941, the day the Japanese began bombing Singapore, he was taking his history test.

1942 Works in a Japanese biological warfare factory in Singapore.

1946 Starts out as a radio technician in East Coast Road, then joins the Malay-language newspaper Utusan Melayu here as a clerk. A week later, its founder-editor Yusof Ishak, who later becomes president of Singapore, makes him a cub reporter.

1948 Utusan posts him to Kuala Lumpur.

1949 Marries Daliah Mohd Noor, known fondly as Cik Dah, a reporter at the paper's branch in Kuala Lumpur. Wins the Colonial Development Scholarship to study journalism in London for a year.



Mr Othman taking his oath of office at City Hall in 1963. Flanking him are Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Mr Yusof Ishak.

1950 In London, he turns down a request to represent Malaya in the Western Students' Union, to focus on his studies.

1951 Returns to Singapore, where Mr Yusof promotes him to chief reporter. He is also elected secretary of the Singapore Printing Employers' Union, whose lawyer is Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

1954 Becomes a founding member of the People's Action Party. He helps out in its Malay Affairs Bureau, translates Mr Lee's speeches into Malay and edits its magazine Petir.

1957 Is appointed Utusan's deputy editor.

1959 Stands for election in Kampong Kembangan, a stronghold of Malaysia's Umno, and is trounced by its candidate Ali Alwi.

1963 Wins election in the ward of Pasir Panjang by 992 votes, with future prime minister Goh Chok Tong among his voters. Quits Utusan, is made Minister of Social Affairs, and is the only Malay-Muslim in Cabinet.

1965 Takes over the Ministry of Culture from Mr S. Rajaratnam, and runs it concurrently with Social Affairs.

International soccer star Pele trying his hand at eating peanuts with chopsticks, much to the amusement of Mr Othman, in 1974.



Mr Othman (right) marching with the People's Defence Force as an officer cadet in Singapore's first National Day Parade in 1966.

1966 Assists Professor Ahmad Ibrahim, Singapore's first attorney-general, in shaping the seminal Administration of Muslim Law Act 1966, which establishes Muis (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) and the Syariah Court here. Also begins overseeing the construction of the National Stadium, which opens on July 21, 1973.

1968 Initiates the incorporation of the Singapore Council of Social Service, which is now known as the National Council of Social Service, to tighten its focus and make it more efficient.

1975 Takes Madam Lina Abdullah, a divorcee with a daughter, as his second wife.

1977 Relinquishes his Social Affairs portfolio upon being made Singapore's Ambassador to Indonesia. He remains a Minister Without Portfolio.

1978 Cheats death in Indonesia when he misses a flight to a resort in Bali – the helicopter he was to have taken crashes, killing all on board.

1980 Awarded Indonesia's Jasa Utama Star.

1981 Retires from politics after 18 years as MP for Pasir Panjang. Is made a permanent member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights. Joins the boards of the then Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (until 1994) and the Sentosa Development Corporation (until 1997).

1990 Conferred the Order of Nila Utama (Second Class) by President Wee Kim Wee.



Mr Othman leaving for Jakarta to assume his new duties in 1977.



Mr Othman and his wife Lina Abdullah arriving at Raffles Hotel to mark the 80th birthday of President S R Nathan in 2004.

1995 Begins writing a series of seven books on local ghost stories.

2000 Publishes his biography in English, Never In My Wildest Dreams.

2008 Is awarded the Eminent Journalist of the Malay World accolade by the Former Berita Harian Malaysia Journalists Association for his contributions to journalism.



(From left) Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Dr Maliki Osman, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Madam Lina Abdullah and Mrs Lee celebrating the 91st birthday of Mr Othman (seated) at his home on Oct 10, 2015.