



PM Goh remembers

PRIME Minister Goh Chok Tong, who studied at Raffles Institution from 1955 to 1960, remembers Mr Ambiavagar (left) as a strict principal "who placed great emphasis on English and mathematics".

'I think he introduced the requirement for all students to pass the two subjects before they could be promoted. I saw Mr Ambiavagar a few times at social functions many years after his retirement. He had kept himself trim and was youthful-looking for his age. I am sorry to learn of his passing. His son, Rajendran, was my classmate.'

— PM Goh, pictured during his RI days (front row, extreme right)

RI's first Asian headmaster dies

A true-blue Rafflesian, the school's 16th principal, Mr V. Ambiavagar, 96, had been working on his autobiography

By TRACY QUEK

RAFFLES Institution's first Asian headmaster V. Ambiavagar, its 16th headmaster, died of pneumonia yesterday.

He was 96 and had been working on his autobiography just days before he died.

An avid and frequent golfer, he took ill suddenly and died in Changi General Hospital at 6.45 am.

Mr Ambiavagar is survived by his wife, Mrs Mangaleswa-

ry Ambiavagar, 87, also a retired school principal, a son and three daughters.

One daughter was a teacher, now retired. The others are all doctors.

They all studied at Raffles. The daughters attended the sister school, Raffles Girls' School.

A 100-per-cent Raffles product himself, Mr Ambiavagar studied at Raffles Institution (RI), returned to teach, and then headed the school

from 1958 to 1959.

A keen sportsman who enjoyed cricket and soccer as a schoolboy, he taught at RI for 27 years after graduating from Raffles College in 1931.

He went on to become the deputy director-general for education from 1960 to 1961.

Though he was old, his death still took the family by surprise.

His son-in-law, Dr A. Pathmanathan, 72, said: "He became ill only about four days ago, on Sunday. Before that, he was perfectly fine.

"In fact, up till the day he was admitted to hospital, he was at the computer working to finish his autobiography."

Dr Pathmanathan, a dental

surgeon, and his wife, Dr Indira Pathmanathan, 65, Mr Ambiavagar's eldest daughter, live in Kuala Lumpur.

They rushed here on Wednesday afternoon on hearing that Mr Ambiavagar's condition had worsened.

"When we went to see him, he was still lucid and alert; it was during the last 10 hours that his condition deteriorated," his son-in-law said in a telephone interview from the Ambiavagars' apartment in Telok Kurau.

He added that Mr Ambiavagar had driven a car until he was 92 years old, and still kept fit by taking regular walks.

But his life's passion was education, and he was wholly

devoted to the school he served and the students he taught, said Dr Pathmanathan.

Former students interviewed said they remembered him best as a dedicated teacher with a powerful command of the English language.

Dr Wong Yip Chong, 72, medical director and senior consultant of Adam Road Psychiatric Hospital, was his student in 1948, and stayed in touch with him.

He said: "He is a great man to me; a very soft-spoken, polite man. When he asked us to do something, we would do it out of respect for him."

Mr Eugene Wijesingha, principal of RI from 1985 to

1994, remembers him as a role model for both teachers and students, and an "excellent administrator who knew precisely what he wanted for the school".

But he was also a man who touched students' lives, said Dr Lim Hock Siew, 70, a family doctor.

"He would call us into his office and speak to us personally about our ambitions. He gave us invaluable advice that we held dear throughout our lives," he said.

The wake will be held at Singapore Casket today from 2 pm to 5 pm, and the cortege is due to leave at 5.15 pm for the Mount Vernon crematorium.

RAFFLES PRODUCT

FORMERLY a student at Raffles Institution, Mr Ambiavagar returned there to teach, and headed the school from 1958 to 1959.

As a student, he was a keen sportsman who enjoyed cricket and soccer. He taught at RI for 27 years after graduating from Raffles College in 1931.