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A sacrifice to be cherished

ALOR Star-born Yang Bao Hua will always remember his experiences as a "Nanyang cheekong" in China during World War Two.

Yang, 85, who now lives in Kunming, Yunnan, said the task, while really tough, was a sacrifice he will always cherish.

"I left home to become a "cheekong" volunteer in Yunnan at the age of 25 to help in the war by transporting army supplies along the Burma-Kunming road," he said, pausing at times in his Kedah Malay dialect.

He said some of the drivers were killed in Japanese air raids while carrying out their tasks.

"I missed my family members and penakan (relatives) and was looking forward to going home after the war in 1945, but somehow I missed the boat which was supposed to take us back to Malaya," he said.

"I didn't know what to do after that so I settled down in Yunnan and got married in 1946."

He said life was difficult for most cheekongs who were left behind. Some had to do odd jobs while others became drivers or mechanics.

Yang, who has seven children and eight grandchildren, said they later set up the Yunnan Friendship Association of South East Asia Overseas Chinese Mechanical Workers with about 70 members in 1983 to look after the welfare of the cheekongs and their families.

He said they were very happy to have met Tan Kai Hee of the Malaysia-China Friendship Association during his visit with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Yunnan in 1994.

"A group of us visited Malaysia the following year at the invitation of the association," he said. "We were taken on a tour of various places including Penang and Malacca."

Still referring to the country as Malaya, Yang said he was happy to see it now a modern country with beautiful landmarks and skyscrapers.

He said he plans to bring his family over to visit relatives and see the country.

Another former cheekong, Yap Ah Bee, 80, from Batu Pahat, who returned home after serving in China, went to Yunnan for a visit last year but lost his passport.

He enlisted the help of the MCFA which got him a new passport.

Yap said he was happy to have attended the ceremony as it gave him the opportunity to get to know cheekongs he had never met before.

He said he was very proud to have volunteered to serve in the Chinese Revolutionary Army against the Japanese.

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