

15/09/2001

An infamy that will always linger on

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IN the years to come, it shouldn't come as a surprise if we were to try and recollect where we were and what we were doing on that eventful day of Sept 11 - hence Black September.

For Malaysians, Black September will always be related to the day the music died when we experienced our first nationwide blackout several years ago!

Of course, if one were to go further down memory lane, there was also the other infamous Black September, which took place at the Munich Olympics in 1972.

Sept 11, 2001, will definitely go down in history as a day to remember.

On that day, I was still in the midst of trying to settle into my apartment off Moscow Road in Central London's Bayswater, an affluent district which housed the NST's bureau in Britain.

On Tuesday morning, I was finalising preparations for on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's meeting with Tony Blair.

A quick stopover, at No 10, Downing Street, and then off to his next destination. All this was being juggled with how to send the story and pictures back to Kuala Lumpur on time for NST's editions.

It was around lunch time that day when the editor of Business Times, Ahiruddin "Rocky" Attan and Nuraina Samad, NST News Editor, decided to call at the apartment. They were in London enroute to Moscow to cover the Prime Minister's next leg of his official tour.

Having settled into those large comfy sofas, I switched on the television and after jumping channels, the visual of smoke billowing from a tall building which looked familiar stopped me in my tracks.

It was exactly 2.04pm and we were watching BBC's Channel 24 ... about six minutes after the first passenger jet had slammed into the World Trade Center in New York. And, here we were in London watching events unfold.

Talk about "breaking news" and live coverage!

We were glued to the large screen and the sight of the second plane crashing into the second tower sent us into realms of reality never before experienced - a terrorist attack!

And, the excitement of having to inform KL about what we were watching - we on BBC with KL viewing CNN.

I decided to take a walkabout to have a feel of things in the neighbourhood.

Bayswater/Queensway is a cosmopolitan district which boasts an array of races, colours, creeds, and this includes Malaysians.

For many Malaysians, London has become a "second home". The "local" was crowded with viewers glued to the television set. There was grief and a sense of urgency in the air as events continued to unfold across the Atlantic.

By simply walking down the main avenue, one can feel the pulse of things following the events in New York.

People from all walks of life were glued to television sets. While some wept openly, others just gaped in horror.

And it was among this crowd that three Malaysians were spotted making purchases at Crests of London, a store specialising in the sale of souvenirs.

While the adjacent store, Photostereo Ltd, was abuzz with activity as people thronged to watch events unfold, the Malaysians simply continued

with their purchases.

One can only attribute this nonchalant attitude to what Malaysians have taken for granted - security and safety. For this, we have to thank our uniformed corps for providing us with that blanket of security which we have grown accustomed to over the years.

Since Tuesday, the "bobby" has been a common sight on London streets, unlike the previous week when they were not easily visible, and this could be attributed to policing methods.

But the severity of what took place in New York, and the realisation that anything was possible as terrorists respect no borders, resulted in police pouring onto London streets.

The security cordon mounted around possible terrorist targets like the underground, government buildings, declaring Central London to be a "no-fly" zone, was unprecedented.

It seems that even threats from the Irish Republican Army has never been dealt with in such magnitude.

But this is what happens when there is a clear and present danger!

All this happening on Sept 11, and it was not even my first week in this city!

One can be assured that the weeks to come will continue to be eventful.