

'My body quivered as I shouted Merdeka'

KUALA LUMPUR: Standing behind Tunku Abdul Rahman, James Au was aware of rain drops falling on his tongue as he shouted "Merdeka" with the first Prime Minister.

"I felt my body quiver as I shouted the words," said Au, 69, who was 19 then.

Merdeka Day was a day of celebration for the former tour guide who lived through the British and Japanese occupation as well as the Emergency period.

Having read Sir Winston Churchill's accounts of World War II before Merdeka he was interested in history and decided to be at Merdeka Stadium to celebrate the auspicious occasion.

He wore a white long-sleeved

shirt and baggy pants and left his home in Jalan San Peng on his Raleigh bicycle for Merdeka Stadium.

"White signified pureness and sincerity," he said as he pointed to a blurred image of himself in a poster-sized photo at the "1957: Road to Nationhood" photographic exhibition at the Bangsar Shopping Complex yesterday.

"People were excited and wanted to get the best seats but they were calm and orderly," said Au, lamenting today's "mad rush" attitude.

"I remember cycling home feeling like I just wanted to jump about," he said.

He has the Sept 1, 1957 issue of the *Straits Times* which he had

then purchased for 20 cents. He also bought a T-shirt which had Tunku's laminated picture on it.

The night before Merdeka he had watched the lowering of the Union Jack flag at what is now called Dataran Merdeka,

Now a retiree, Au said he passes his time riding his motorcycle.

Among the highlights of the exhibition is the screening of four documentaries, while souvenirs, such as the reprints of the Sept 1, 1957 issue of *The Straits Times*, are available for sale.

The exhibition is jointly organised by The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad (NSTP) and Bandaraya Development Berhad and is open daily from 10am-10pm and ends on Sept 10.