

# Merdeka! still rings loud

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**KULIM:** In 1948, when a young office boy at the Football Association of Selangor was asked to be a part-time driver for a deputy public prosecutor, he had little inkling how important that man was going to be.

Looking back through the years, R. Kalimuthoo, now 81, gets misty-eyed when he talks about the DPP who went on to become the country's first Prime Minister.

He remembers vividly the day Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was the FAS president when Kalimuthoo first chauffeured him around, proclaimed Malaya's Independence at the Merdeka Stadium on Aug 31, 1957.

"It still brings tears to my eyes when I see the Tunku on TV leading the nation in shouts of *Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!* on that day," said Kalimuthoo, who has seven daughters and nine sons from two marriages.

He now lives alone in Taman KTC at the Kulim High-Tech Park.

He has separated from his second wife S. Thanam, 64, while first wife C. Suppamah, 75, who he had divorced, died three years ago. From the 16 children that he had with them, Kalimuthoo has 27 grandchildren.

Recalling the early days with



**REMEMBERING TUNKU:** Kalimuthoo (left) and his neighbours looking at a portrait of the Tunku at his home in Kulim.

the Tunku, he said he was paid RM150 a month to be the former prime minister's driver in 1957.

"We became inseparable and travelled miles together. We were like *kuku dengan isi* (close friends)," Kalimuthoo said; when interviewed here.

Being the trusted chauffeur gave him an insight into the late Tunku's personal likes and dislikes, political visions and the ups and downs.

"The Tunku used to tell me a lot of things while I drove him. Although born a prince, he was a humble man who loved the common people," added Kalimuthoo, who now lives on a RM360 monthly pension.

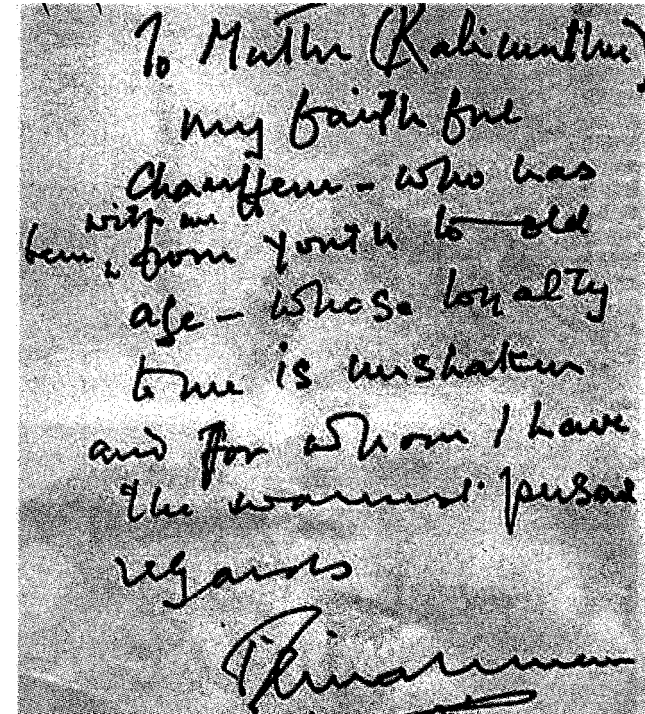
The former driver described the first Prime Minister as a (unloving man who loved to have guests at his home.

After the Tunku retired on Sept 22, 1970, the Hari Raya celebra-

tions at his Ayer Rajah Road residence in Penang continued to be celebrated on a grand scale, he added.

Kalimuthoo served the Tunku officially from 1957 to 1982. The job was taken over by one of his sons from 1982 to 1987.

He stayed at the Ayer Rajah Road residence until about three months before the Tunku's death when he decided to move to Selayang Baru in Selangor to



A NOTE: A personnel message to Kalimuthoo from Tunku while Kalimuthoo was working for him.

live in his own house.

"I was in my Selayang Baru home when I heard over the radio that the Tunku was very ill," he said.

"One of my sons took me to the Kuala Lumpur Hospital, where I waited in the room with (then prime minister) Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the

Tunku's private secretary Cheah Phee Cheok.

"The Tunku took his last breath at about 11pm on Dec 6, 1990.

"Before he died, he gave me RM21,000 to settle my housing loan, a gold ring with a ruby stone, a Seiko watch and a pair of slacks and a coat," he added.