

The personal sacrifices of Tunku

• By Audrey Dermawan
audreymd@nst.com.my

GEORGE TOWN: They are inseparable: Merdeka and the Tunku.

The image of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj raising his hand as he proclaimed "Merdeka" defines Aug 31, 1957 for every Malaysian.

The Tunku, as he has come to be lovingly known, was a giant. Together with his Alliance Party leaders, he was at the forefront of the fight for independence from British rule.

Many do not know the personal sacrifices the Tunku made to win independence. Datuk Seri Mohd Yusof Latiff is one of those with the knowledge.

His sacrifices to the nation and the party are beyond words. I can still remember the time he sold his row of houses on Jalan Argyll here — one by one — to finance the party.

"That is Tunku for you. He put the nation, the people and Umno above himself and his comfort," revealed Yusof.

Yusof is one of those who helped the Tunku in the struggle. Yusof continues to play an active role in Penang's social and cultural life today. He also heads the Penang Malays Association.

Every year as Merdeka approaches, he is invited by schools and organisations to share his knowledge of the Tunku and the fight for independence.

Yusof, 76, cannot forget the year he turned 21, for that was the year he became acquainted with the Tunku. It changed his life forever as he joined the Tunku in the struggle for independence.

As Penang Umno Youth secretary, Yusof spent much time with the Tunku, sharing ideas and getting to know the future prime minister intimately.

"Tunku was a staunch believer in the need for unity



Yusof treasures his memories of the Tunku. — NST picture by Kamil Rahim

among the races. He always stressed that the races should respect each other and cooperate. This conviction contributed to the various races coming together in amity and working as one to win inde-

pendence.

"In fact, until his last days, Tunku held steadfast to this conviction, this belief."

Yusof said the Tunku's views on power-sharing and his liberal views on other mat-

ters often landed him in "hot water", even among Umno members.

"Tunku used to tell us, if unity does not prevail, chaos and havoc would reign. He told us that Umno alone would not be

GOLDEN MERDEKA
Memories

MERDEKA. The very word evokes emotion. How did those who took part in the epochal gatherings at the Selangor Club padang and Merdeka Stadium on Aug 31, 1957 feel? What memories do they have of the nation's founding fathers?

Beginning today, the *New Straits Times* tells the stories of some of these people.

If you had participated in the Merdeka celebrations or know of someone who did, please drop us a line.

If you have any Merdeka memorabilia, we would like to know too. We may want to interview you.

Please contact us at 03-22621970 or send an email to news@nst.com.my

31, 1957," he said, pointing to a beautifully-framed photograph at the entrance to the office.

Recollecting his meetings and talks with the Tunku, Yusof said: "Those were the days ... Tunku and I shared many experiences."

However, on that most memorable day of 1957, he was not with the Tunku at Merdeka Stadium.

"There was also a celebration at the Esplanade in Penang and I was actively involved in that. But I was With him in mind and heart"

Yusof said that as part of the Merdeka proclamation, all States in the Federation held their own celebrations.

Recalling the period when he was state Umno Youth secretary from 1952 to 1962, Yusof said the Tunku frequented Penang and Penang residents saw him not only as a leader but also a father figure.

Yusof said the Tunku's "most priceless gift" was the formation of the Alliance, what he termed a football-loam formula.

At that time, the Tunku was president of both the Football Association of Malaya and the Football Association of Selangor.

"Tunku once said a football team comprised various people working together to score goals and it was no different for a country. So he felt that the various communities in the country had to work together — like a football team — to achieve independence."

On his last meeting with the Tunku, Yusof said: I went to a private hospital here to visit Tunku. I told him I was leaving for Taiwan for a week. Despite all the machines and tubes fixed to him. Tunku, told me he would be flying to Sarawak to open the Warriors' Mausoleum.

"He added that if he were to die, let it be said that he died fighting. Those were his last words to me."

able to ensure an independent Malaya. That was why he invited the MCA and the MIC to form the Alliance (the forerunner of the Barisan Nasional).

"Not only did we win handsomely in the 1955 general election, Malaya gained independence just two years later. No one could have done it better and faster," Yusof added, beaming with pride and respect for the Tunku.

On the walls of his office hang photographs of him with all five prime ministers and other prominent figures.

"That is Tunku's picture a few minutes before the Merdeka proclamation on Aug