

49 years on, memories still vivid in Yap's mind

• By Eileen Ng
and Wong Pel Chen
news@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Forty-nine years may have elapsed, but Yap Teck Min's recollection of that Merdeka morning is still as vivid as ever in his mind.

The 80-year-old cannot forget the general air of joy, the feeling of expectancy over the future and the satisfaction of finally achieving Independence.

Also indelibly etched in his mind are the pictures from that eventful morning when Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj raised his hand — and voice — to signal the start of a new era for a fledgling nation. There is a discernible sense of pride when he recounts the moment Independence was announced.

The retired businessman remembers the Tunku's speech at the Merdeka Stadium coming to an end and the crowd suddenly going silent.

"There was a pause that signalled that something profound had occurred. There was a realisation that a new beginning was dawning on us," he said in an interview at his home.

The Tunku then raised his arm and shouted "Merdeka" seven times and everybody followed.

When he stopped, the stadium went wild as people hugged each other and shouted "Merdeka".

"It was one of the proudest moments of my life," he said, adding that the morning sun was at its height but no one felt the heat.

Then, the drums started to roll and the flag was raised to the strains of *NegaraKu*.

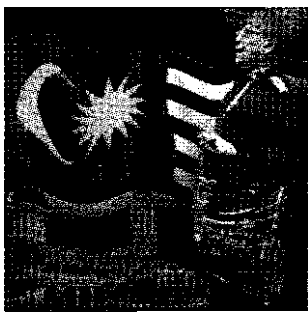
"I tried to sing along although I did not know the lyrics. I knew it was a moment that came only once in one's life," he said.

For Yap, it was the culmination of his own efforts to prepare the Chinese community for nationhood by encouraging them to join the MCA.

A year before, on hearing that the Tunku had left for London to negotiate Independence, he had got together a small group to go around town with loud-hailers to ask the Chinese to join the party.

It was with some sense of satisfaction that the fabric trader saw a substantial number of Chinese

MERDEKA



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?

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 03-22821970 or send an email to news@nst.com.my

in the crowds heading towards the stadium.

Yap's day had started at 7am when he had parked his car two kilometres away in Jalan Pudu to walk to the stadium with 30 friends.

"There was no way we could get closer by car," said Yap, a pioneer member of the MCA whose party membership card was signed by party founder-president Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

Yap's only regret is that he did not take a camera to the stadium.

"I could have had my own personal collection of photographs to reminisce over."

What does he wish for the country as it prepares for the 49th Merdeka celebrations? "I want Malaysia to continue to prosper and all its people to live in harmony."