

'Even the sky wept with joy'

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MALACCA: The clock struck midnight and the crowd fell silent as the Union Jack was lowered. Then thunderous applause broke out as the Federation of Malaya flag was raised.

Datuk Wira Borhan Yaman can still remember with startling clarity this scene at the Selangor Club field (now Dataran Merdeka) on Aug 31, 49 years ago.

"It was a symbolic gesture, but one that echoes strongly in my mind to this day. It symbolised that we had finally become masters of our own country. Because we were united — Malays, Chinese, Indians and others — we were 'freed'," said Borhan, now 77, at his home in Klebang Besar here yesterday.

On that historic night, Borhan was one of 12 Umno Youth state representatives standing to attention before the flag pole at the Selangor Club field with the nation's founding father Tunku Abdul Rahman. Al-Haj, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Umno Malaya Youth chief Tun Sardon Jubir and Kaum Ibu Malaya chief Tun Fatimah Hashim.

He said the sense of anticipation among the people who had gathered at the field as early as 6pm was almost palpable.

"I was in my white Umno shirt and white pants, complete with a black *lengkolok* on my head. The heat was stifling and the crowd was getting a little restless, but when the clock struck midnight and the ceremony began, everyone quietened down."

When the Union Jack was lowered, the field was silent, but when the Federation of Malaya flag was raised by two Umno Youth representatives

— Hamzah Alang and Cikgu Abdul Wahab Idris and a Kaum Ibu woman, whom Borhan only remembered as Amna,— the crowd went wild as the field echoed with their deafening cheers.

"The flag bearers are all dead now, but whenever I look back on that night. I can still remember, the earnest looks on their faces, the pride and the joy, which I am sure was also reflected on my own sweaty face," said Borhan with a smile as he recalled the poignant moment.

There was no rallying speech after the simple flag-hoisting ceremony but the crowd only started to leave about 2am.

"Many, including my wife and I, stayed on to admire the beautiful Malayan flag — the flag that told us that We were now people of a free country," Borhan said.

Gazing at the flag as he rested on the grassy field, Borhan said that what Tunku had told Umno members before he went to London to negotiate for Malaya's independence kept playing in his mind.

"He said, and I quote: 'I will fight to gain independence for Malaya in my own way. If my grandfather the Sultan of Kedah surrendered his State to Francis light with, just a pen. I will try to get back our independence by using the tip of a pen also.' And he did just that."

However, Borhan said, the elation that night was slightly dampened by the presence of grim-faced soldiers patrolling the Selangor Club area because the state of emergency declared in 1948 had not been lifted then.

"And since the flag-hoisting ceremony was late at night, many people dared not venture out of their home to witness the event for fear of com-



Borhan recounting the scene at the raising of the Malayan flag

munist attacks."

Borhan said he had travelled to Kuala Lumpur from his hometown in Malacca on the afternoon of Aug 30.

"We were poor people and not many in our village owned a car. So I used up nearly all my savings to rent a taxi for Malacca Umno treasurer Johar Abdul Azizi, my wife and I to get to Kuala Lumpur," said Borhan, who was then a teacher.

They had no place to stay and after the crowd dispersed that night, Borhan's group met a man who offered them his "hut of a home" in Cheras, for the night.

"I still remember him say-

ing: Come and don't worry about paying me. Why?' Well... because it's Merdeka, my friends."

When the group woke about 5am to make their way to Stadium Merdeka where the Declaration of Independence would be held, it was raining cats and dogs.

The rain let up around 7am. But there was still a slight drizzle as we made our way into the stadium and after we found a place to stand, I looked around and saw that the place was a sea of umbrellas."

Borhan said the rain was like a blessing because "it felt like even the sky was weeping with joy for us".



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

And when the British representative presented the Declaration of Independence to the Turkish stadium was silent but when Tunku read aloud the declaration, every sentence was punctuated by cries of "Merdeka".

"I cried shamelessly that morning. Standing tail with my fellow countrymen, hot tears poured down my cheeks as I raised my fist to cry out that one sweet word — Merdeka — again and again."