

# National flag chosen by people in one of country's first public polls

• By **Sonia Ramachandran**  
sonia@nst.com.my

**BANGI:** Everyone knows the national flag was hoisted at the Selangor Club field just after midnight on Aug 31, 1957.

But not many know that the flag first appeared in 1950, seven years earlier.

Designed by Public Works Department staff Mohamad Hamzah, the flag was hoisted for the first time at the Istana Selangor grounds on May 26, 1950.

Interestingly, the design for the flag was selected by Malaysians through a public poll.

In fact, it was one of the first polls ever undertaken by the Government.

When the Federation of Malaya was formed in favour of the Malayan Union on Feb 1, 1948, it lacked its own flag and coat of arms.

The then Government held a nationwide contest, and 373 designs for the national flag were submitted.

The judging committee of the Federal Legislative Council shortlisted three, according to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia School of Media and Communication Studies lecturer Prof Dr Mohd Safar Hasim.

Safar's fascination with the national flag was so great that when he was in London to do some research two months ago, he visited the British National Archives in Kew, London, to find out more about the flag.

He said the first design showed a circle of 11 white stars (representing the nine states and two settlements then) on a blue background. In the middle of the circle were two crossed *keris*.

The second design consisted of a concentric circle of 11 stars around crossed *keris* on a blue field.

The third design had 11 alternate blue and white stripes and a yellow crescent and a five-pointed star on a red background in the top left hand corner.

The Federal Legislative Council then put the designs to a vote by publishing them in the only English paper printed locally at that time — *The Malay Mail*. (*The Straits Times* was then published in Singapore.)



**Safar feels the person who created the flag should be honoured**

The third design was the choice of the people.

"That was one of the first polls asking the people's opinion on something the Government was embarking on," said Safar.

The Federal Legislative Council then took an informal vote on the three shortlisted designs with the first design getting 21 votes and the third, 47 votes. The second design did not get any vote.

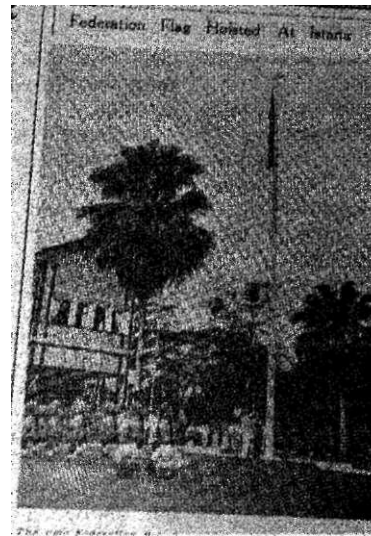
"Put by the time the informal vote was taken, there were already changes being made to the third design, taking into account the people's recommendations.

"The blue stripes were, now red and the star and crescent, white. The points of the star were also increased to 11, and the crescent, which was originally off-centre, was repositioned to its current position, the background for the star and crescent was also now in blue,

"The star's points were increased because we were fighting the Communists at that time and the Chinese Communist flag had five points."

The two designs were then presented to the Conference of Rulers on Feb 23, 1950.

The then High Commissioner of the Federation, Sir Henry Gurney, submitted an explanation for the third design to the Rulers.

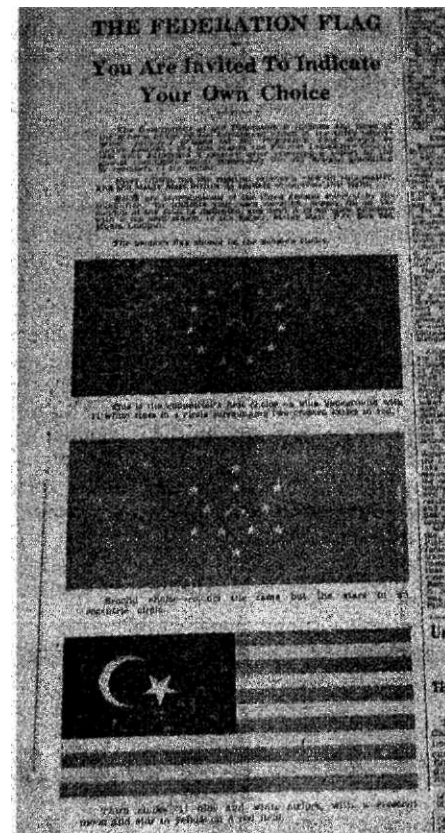


**A photo in the May 27, 1950, issue of *The Malay Mail* showing the hoisting of the Federation Flag for the first time the day before Merdeka by Gurney at Istana Selangor. — NST picture by L. Manimaran**

During the meeting, the Sultan of Kedah, Tuanku Badli Shah ibni al-Marhum Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah, said all the colours representing friendship with Britain and the Commonwealth were present except for yellow, the accepted royal colour.

His sentiment was echoed by the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan, Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Muhammad (who went on to become the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong) and the Sultan of Pahang, Tuanku Abu Bakar Riayatuddin al-Muadzam Shah ibni al-Marhum Sultan Abdullah.

The Sultan of Kelantan, Tuanku Ibrahim ibni al-Marhum Selangor Muhammad, the Sultan of Selangor, Tuanku Hisamuddin Alai Shah ibni, al-Marhum Sultan Alaeddin Sulaiman Shah and the Sultan of Perak, Tuanku Yusuf Izzuddin Shah ibni al-Marhum Sultan Abdul Jalil Nasruddin Muhtaram Shah, however, preferred the star and crescent to be in white but did not object to the change to yellow.



**The Federation Government inviting the public to vote for their choice of flag in a November, 1949, issue of *The Malay Mail*.**

On April 19, 1950 the flag was approved and sent to King George VI, who gave his consent on May 19, 1950.

A letter from the Federation of Malaya Public Relations Department acting deputy director Yaacob Latiff to the London, Foreign Office dated June 7, 1950, said the flag was hoisted for the first time at the Istana Selangor grounds on May 26, 1950.

Together with the letter, three paper copies of the flag were sent to the Foreign Office explaining that the 11 red and white stripes and points of the star symbolised the unity of the nine states and two settlements.

The yellow star and crescent, it said, was the royal colour representing the Sultanate Monarchies of the Malay States.



**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](mailto:news@nst.com.my)

The main colours of red, white and blue represented the partnership between the federation of Malaya and the United Kingdom as well as the Commonwealth of Nations.

When Malaya attained independence on Aug 31, 1957, the flag was adopted as the national flag and when Malaysia came into being on Sept 16, 1963, the flag became the Malaysian flag with two changes — the eleven stripes and points of the star were increased to 14, taking into account Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore.

Safar suggested that Mohamad Hamzah be honoured for his contribution.