

# Umno marks 1946 rally against Malayan Union

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■ By Sim Bak Heng  
news@nst.com.my

BATU PAHAT, Sun. — It was a close re-enactment of a historical event.

Sixty years ago, Datuk Onn Jaafar, Umno's founding father, addressed the crowd in this town.

Today, it was Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the party's present leader. But the words were the same — unite to remain a strong and cohesive political force.

The Prime Minister, speaking to some 20,000 people at an assembly to commemorate an anti-Malayan Union rally here on Feb 10, 1946, said Onn's message was still relevant today.

"The spirit of 1946 that captivated the Malays still exists. Onn's message is still fresh in our minds," said Abdullah, who had earlier led the crowd, in traditional baju Melayu, on a one-kilometre procession from the Batu Pahat Umno office to the stadium to recapture the atmosphere of the historic day six decades ago.

"It is vital that we carry on with Onn's struggle. The Malays must remain strong, and to be strong, we have to stay united." He added that without unity and strength, there was no way to achieve Vision 2020.

"There are only 14 years left to realise this grand vision. We have no choice but to stay united."

Those present included Onn's grandson, Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, Umno leaders and Cabinet members.

In 1946, the Peninsular Malay Movement, Johor branch (PMSJ), held a procession and rally attended by some 15,000 Malays to protest the establishment of the Malayan Union, which disregarded the interests of the Malay Rulers as well as the Malays.

Recounting the event, Abdullah said the opposition liberated the Malays from British rule and paved the way for the return of power to



RE-ENACTING HISTORY: Abdullah (in songkok with hand raised) taking part in the procession.

the Malay Rulers.

"If not for Onn's wisdom and strength, we would still be ruled by the British under the Malayan Union today," he said.

"Onn led the Malays to reject the Malayan Union because he wanted the Malays to be strong and independent in their own land.

"But he also cared for other races. He came out with the idea of racial unity and initiated efforts to forge co-operation between the Malays and other races. This is why we have the MCA and the MIC under the BN coalition today."

Today's gathering, part of a programme to recognise Onn's struggle, was organised by the Johor Umno liaison committee and the Johor Heritage Foundation.

On arrival at the stadium, Abdul-

lah was given a rousing reception by the crowd which chanted "*Hidup Melayu!*" (Long Live the Malays).

It was followed by a pledge on Malay nationalism read by Yusof Salleh, son of former Malay nationalist Kiyai Salleh, who had read the same pledge in 1946.

Another founding nationalist, Abdullah Mohd Nor, recited a patriotic poem titled "*Batu Pahat Tanah Keramat — Bumi Bertuah*" (Batu Pahat the Sacred Land — Blessed Soil).

Abdullah also presented a special award to 19 people who had joined Onn in the original protest.

Among the recipients were PMSJ co-founder Fatimah Yakup, vice-president of the first PMSJ Datuk Syed Esa Alwee and Batu Pahat

Umno permanent chairman Mohd Diah Abdul Rahman.

Earlier, Abdullah had lunch at the Dewan Jubli Intan, where he watched a video clip on Onn's fight for independence and toured a pictorial exhibition of special moments in Umno's history.

Onn founded Umno on the steps of the Istana Besar in Johor Baru on May 11, 1946. The party has since grown to become the dominant political organisation in the BN coalition.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman described Onn as the architect behind the formation of the Federal Government and the Constitution.

He said Onn also helped to restructure the economy of the Malays.