

## 50 years on

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**To many young Malaysians today, the date Feb 20, 1956, probably does not hold much significance.** Despite being the day when it was first declared that Malaya would become a sovereign nation, it has often been overshadowed by the more celebrated Merdeka Day. Many have forgotten that the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, the nation's soon-to-become first Prime Minister, arrived home from London that day and announced at Padang Pahlawan, Banda Hilir here, that he had secured the nation's independence from the British. On Monday, the Malacca Government, together with Umno, MCA and MIC veterans here, will commemorate the 50th anniversary of that momentous occasion.

Organised by the Malacca Museums Corporation (Perzim), the celebrations will begin by re-enacting the events that took place from the moment the Tunku's plane touched down at the Batu Berendam airport here. Tunku left for London on Jan 1, 1956, with several Alliance Party (Parti Perikatan) leaders such as Datuk Abdul Razak Hussein, H.S Lee, T.H. Tan and Abdul Kadir Shamsudin to fulfil the party's 1955 election campaign vow — to free Malaya from British rule. Also with him at the time were two representatives of the Malay rulers, Datuk Nik Ahmad Kamil and Abdul Aziz Abdul Majid.

The group arrived in London on Jan 13 and negotiations started on Jan 18, lasting for almost three weeks. They had thrashed out the terms that would bring about the independence of Malaya, from matters of security, public administration, citizenship and finance, to the contents of the constitution. On Feb 2 the same year, the British finally decreed that Malaya was ready to stand on her own as an independent nation.

With that joyous news, Tunku and his team left for home and arrived at the Batu Berendam airport on Feb 20.

"He was then immediately ushered to Padang Pahlawan to declare to the people of Malaya the date of their nation's independence: August 31, 1957," recounted Perzim curator Mahadi Arifin during rehearsal for the event today. To kick-off the programme for the anniversary celebration here, there will be a procession led by Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam, with an entourage of veterans from the three major component parties of the coalition, at the airport at 3.40pm. The procession will also showcase 30 antique cars, flanked by Umno Youth members on 50 motorcycles.

Other highlights of the day include a recount of the nation's history by Umno veteran Datuk Wira Borham Md Yaman, as well as the reading of the official letter stating the date for the declaration of Malaya's independence by another veteran Umno member, Tan Sri Aziz Tapa.

"This is the first time Feb 20 is celebrated and we expect about 15,000 people — participants as well as local and foreign visitors — to be at the Independence Declaration Memorial at Padang Pahlawan to witness the event," said Mahadi.

Source: NST | [www.nst.com.my](http://www.nst.com.my)