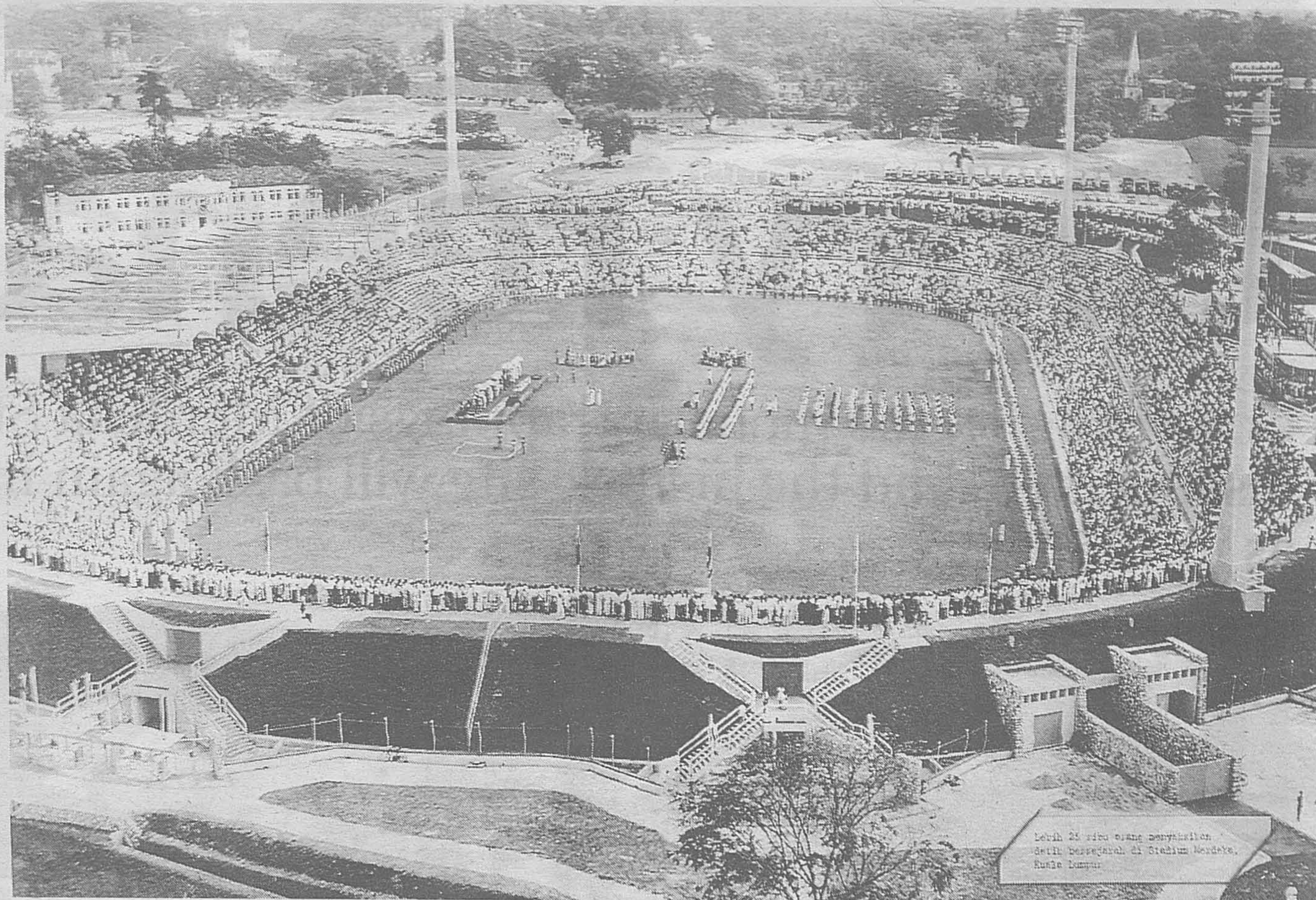


Bringing back the

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Renovations aim to restore Merdeka Stadium



Fond memories: A picture of Merdeka Day celebrations at the stadium in 1957.



Removal: Workers are stripping the track laid for the 1989 SEA Games.

By Y.P. SIVAM

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Photos by CHUA KOK HWA and AZHAR MAHFOF

THE Sultan of Selangor's Cup football competition will be the first sporting event to be held at the Merdeka Stadium after restoration works are completed on Aug 11.

The stadium is undergoing massive renovations at a cost of RM2million and will sport the 1957 look. PNB have undertaken the task to restore, preserve and conserve the stadium where independence was proclaimed by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the country first prime minister.

PNB chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid said the organisers of the Sultan of Selangor's Cup had requested for the use of the stadium



THE SULTAN OF SELANGOR'S CUP

to host this year's competition.

"They also want to celebrate the country's 50th Merdeka anniversary by having the competition at the historic Merdeka Stadium. We are pleased to give them the honour," said Ahmad Sarji.

Merdeka Stadium was also the venue where Malaysia was proclaimed in 1963. It was also the venue for many sporting events including the Merdeka Tournament, the 1975 World Cup hockey final and the 1989 SEA Games.

Ahmad Sarji said PNB had acquired Merdeka Stadium, Stadium Negara and the surrounding area for residential and commercial buildings.

"But we were flooded with enquiries from the public. The interest from all quarters was a big surprise. The 1957 independence proclamation is a subject of interest to many. PNB wants to preserve both the Merdeka Stadium and Stadium Negara as heritage buildings.

"Secondly, both Merdeka Stadium and Stadium Negara were venues for many historical sporting and cultural events," said Ahmad Sarji.

Work on the restructuring of the Merdeka Stadium was initiated after Kuala Lumpur City Hall approved the development plans. The Merdeka Heritage Trust Foundation, headed by Ahmad Sarji himself, will be responsible for the restoration project.

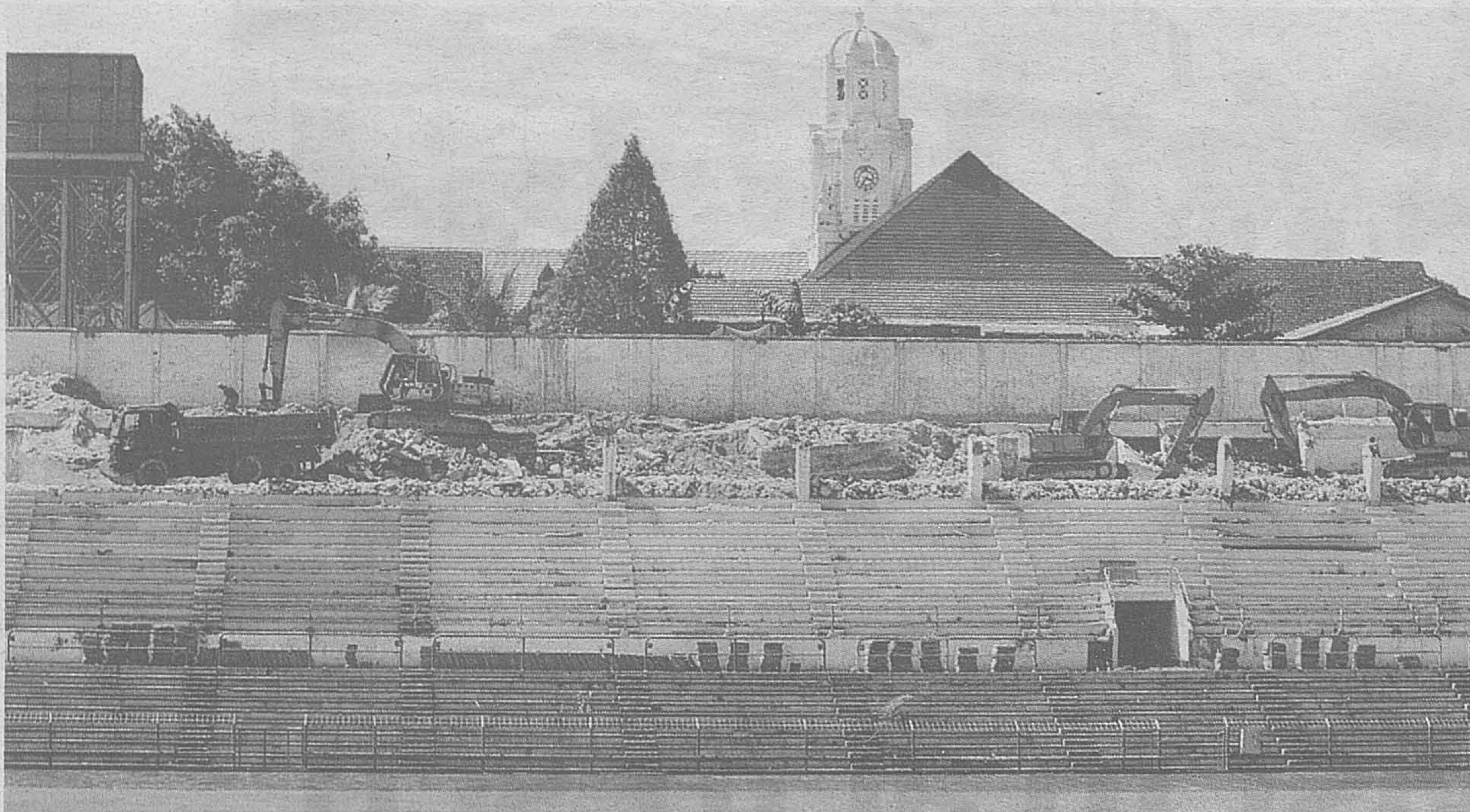
Ahmad Sarji said they were lucky



Demolition time: One of the stands being brought down to bring Merdeka Stadium back to its original specifications.

glory of a stadium

to what it was in 1957



Clear view: Victoria Institution can now be seen from within the stadium grounds.



Ahmad Sarji: The organisers of the Cup had requested for the use of the stadium.

as they managed to get the original plans and drawings of Merdeka Stadium, which was built in 1956.

The then Public Works Department deputy director Stanley Edwards Jewkes headed the Merdeka Stadium project. Jewkes was not an architect but a civil engineer but the Englishman was personally asked by the Tunku to design the stadium.

Ahmad Sarji said they were able to get in touch with Jewkes, who was helpful in many ways.

"Jewkes provided us with a lot of

»We were flooded with enquiries from the public«

TAN SRI AHMAD SARJI ABDUL HAMID

photographs and details pertaining to the original stadium. We also had the original drawings of the stadium," said Ahmad Sarji.

As per the original stadium, the track would be removed, the podium where the Tunku proclaimed "Merdeka" seven times will be restored at the exact spot.

"The actual seating arrangements for the Rulers, the Queen's representative and other officials would be restored. We are taking all steps to have the paintwork similar to that in 1957. We also have found a time capsule but there was nothing magical in it.

"The grand stand will be similar to that in 1957. We have also demolished all other structures like the seat-

ing area opposite the grand stand and both sides. However, the stadium will be subject to a stress test to determine that it will be safe.

"Another reason why we are restoring the original venue was to rekindle loyalty and patriotism in the heart of the younger generation. The younger generation will have the opportunity to enjoy the Aug 31, 1957 atmosphere.

"The youngsters must value and appreciate Merdeka Stadium. Historical buildings are easy to destroy but difficult to preserve.

"Merdeka Stadium has a soul and it must not be destroyed or forgotten," said Ahmad Sarji.

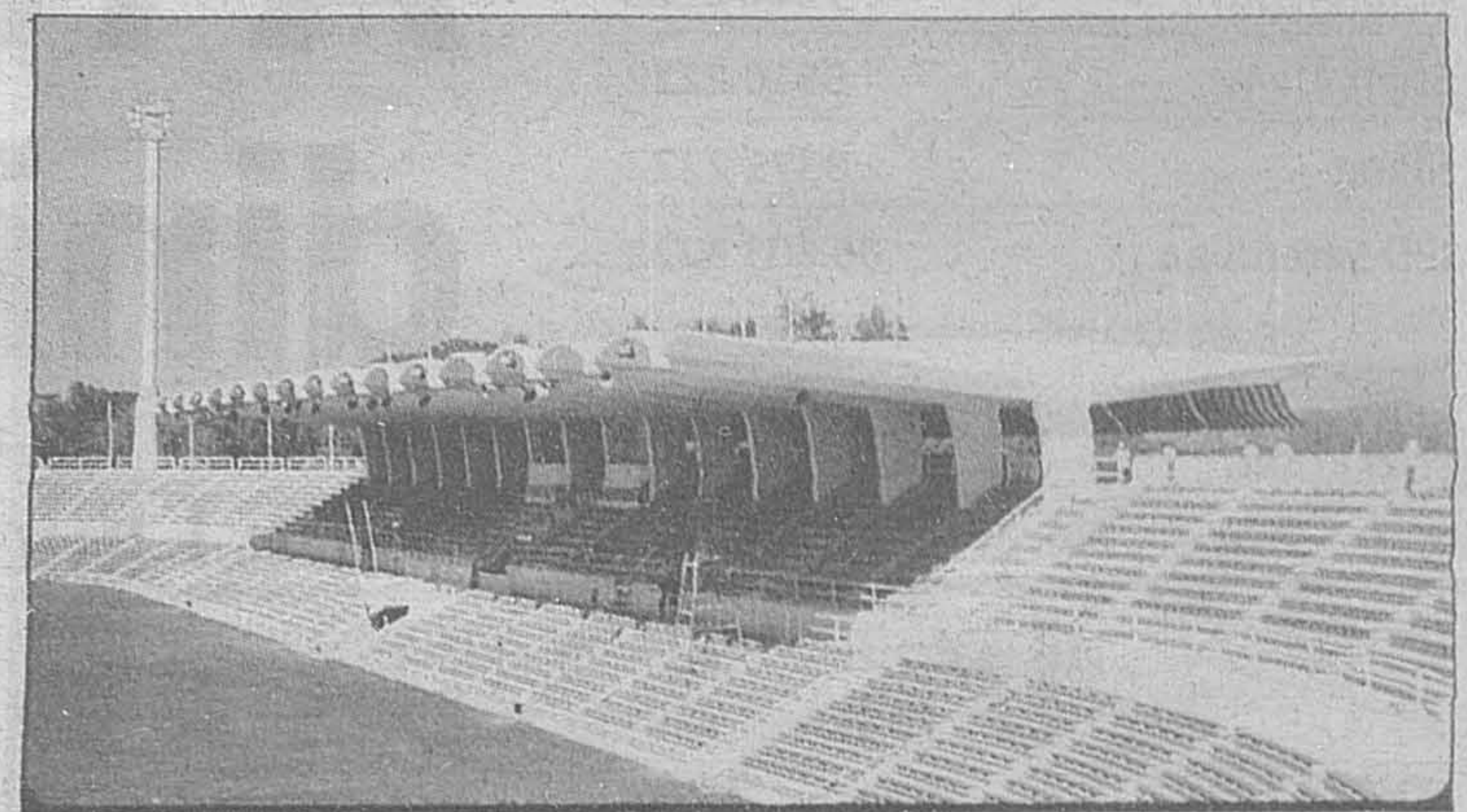
However, Ahmad Sarji admitted that it would be difficult to restore Merdeka Stadium fully.

"It will not be easy for us to get the PA System used in 1957. In the process of restoration, some features like the kiosks were destroyed but we can build it. The main pavilion, two VIP rooms and changing rooms will be back to their original state," said Ahmad Sarji.

The Merdeka Stadium will be handed over the Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry in mid-July. The contractors are working round the clock to ensure that work is completed by then.



No simple task: Even the paintwork is being tailored to match the original.



Almost done: A photographic progress report showing the original grandstand (top) and the conditions at the stadium now.

