

The Malayan resistance

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» Scene: *Shah's Hotel, PJ*

MOHAN: I say Chong, what's the hoo-ha about the memorial to those who died fighting the Japanese during their three-year-eight-month occupation of this country?

Azman: You mean the memorial put up at the Chinese graveyard in Nilai, Negri Sembilan?

Chong: I say Azman, that's a five-star burial place you are talking about. If you want to know, we don't call it a graveyard, we call it the Nilai Memorial Park.

Azman: What's the difference?

Chong: You pay a premium for space there. A lot of people buy a small space as repository for the ashes of their dearly departed. But to bury someone there you have to pay quite a lot. Certainly more than it costs to bury someone in the ordinary graveyard. So please, when you refer to that five-star final resting place call it Nilai Memorial Park. Yes, Mohan, what about it?

Mohan: No, I was referring to the memorial within the Nilai Memorial Park. There was a lot of hoo-ha over it last month.

Chong: Oh, you mean the memorial that includes a monolith, on which is inscribed "In memory of Malayan heroes in the resistance movement against Japanese invasion 1941-1945", in the park? Yes, I remember some unnecessary public commotion over it.

Azman: Because some people in the government thought that it was a memorial to the communists.

Mohan: The Chinese newspapers played up the ruckus over the memorial. The Chinese were naturally not amused because, one, it was as if their efforts to remember those who died fighting the Japanese who committed all kinds of atrocities here were unappreciated, and, two, that the statement tarred the Chinese - all of them - as being communists.

Azman: To me the memorial is OK. It is dedicated to those who died during the Japanese occupation. To me, by saying so, it honours all those who died then - the Chinese, the Indians, the Malays - regardless whether they were communists, democrats, atheists, freemasons or Kuomintang members.

Mohan: Even if those who contributed to the building of the memorial were communists or communist sympathisers, and that in their hearts of hearts it was meant to remember the fallen anti-Japanese communist fighters?

Azman: Yes.

Chong: I agree with Azman. Who cares for their private motives? The declared motive is to remember those who died fighting the Japanese occupation. Certainly among those who died were communists. And British Force 136 that came to help the Malayan people to resist the Japanese also worked closely with them.

Mohan: Anyway, the communists became illegal only in 1948. Their party, the Malayan Communist Party, was banned. And they fought the British who ruled Malaya then and the Malayan government soldiers after the country became independent. We are not talking about them and we are not talking about honouring them. And the memorial in Nilai is not dedicated to them or remembering them. So what's the fuss all about?

Azman: Yes, what's the fuss all about? What do you think, Cikgu?

Zain: Yes. There is no mystery. Someone mentioned that the memorial in Nilai was actually resited from the one put up to remember the communist Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) fighters who were killed near Batu Caves. Could be true. Just know the dialects of those behind the memorial and you know whether it is to remember



What They Say

by Zainon Ahmad

the fallen MPAJA fighters or Kuomintang fighters.

Mohan: You mean the MPAJA was not the sole anti-Japanese resistance movement?

Zain: Absolutely not. There were others. The communists under Lai Teck, a suspected British agent, was not the biggest group. But it was more disciplined. The Kuomintang was the biggest but it was wracked by factionalism. There was the Kong Sai group in Perak. There was also a number of small Malay groups. One of them is the Wataniah group in Pahang. Sometimes they worked together and sometimes they

fought each other, especially the communists and the Kuomintang groups.

Mohan: And so a memorial dedicated to those who fell fighting the Japanese between 1942 and 1945 honours the fighters from all these groups?

Zain: Yes. You know, young men, after the Japanese surrendered, hundreds of monuments were put up by the various groups throughout the country. Someone told me there was even one behind the Teluk Intan police station. It was dedicated to a group who tried to kill Japanese soldiers in the station. But the guy who was supposed to throw the grenade fumbled and it exploded in their midst killing all of them. But the memorial is gone now. As usual it made way for development.

Azman: If I remember correctly, the Kuomintang was the party that ruled China at that time and the communists under Mao Zedong were trying to overthrow it. But didn't they work together to fight the Japanese?

Zain: Just as they worked together here. All positioning themselves for the end of the war. The communists fought the Japanese alongside the Kuomintang so that they could be seen as nationalists. Because of that they won a lot of support and with that they were able to oust the Kuomintang. It was the so-called Chinese Spring. The communists tried to effect a Malayan Spring here but the situation was different. They were outlawed and were referred to - in the jargon of those days - as communist terrorists because of the atrocities they committed.

Mohan: What happened to the Kuomintang?

Zain: Well, many of their leaders became founders of the MCA.

The writer is the Political Editor at the Sun. Comments: feedback@thesundaily.com