

Bringing back the glory to stadiums

■ **By Adrian David**
news@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: It was a long time coming, but better times are in store for Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara.

Not just as venues for sporting events but for the development of youth and sports in general.

That's the view of sports and recreational pundits in response to the government's move to preserve the stadiums.

Kurnia Asia Berhad non-executive director Jimmy Liew, 56, described the stadiums as historical and nostalgic relics.

"We should optimise them not

only for sports and recreation but also for tourism and social activities as they are ideally located.

"This will generate income which can be used for sports and youth development," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced on Wednesday that Permodalan Nasional Berhad had been appointed to set up "The Merdeka Heritage Trust" to manage both structures.

For a start, Stadium Merdeka will be renovated, while retaining its originality, as one of the prime locations for the country's 50th Merdeka Day celebrations.

Former national discus and

hammer throw champion M. Dataya, 72, described the move as a timely effort for long-term gains.

"It will help rekindle the spirit of independence and sporting glory, besides passing it on to younger Malaysians," said the winner of the gold and silver medals in the discus and hammer throw event at the 1963 South East Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games at Stadium Merdeka in 1963.

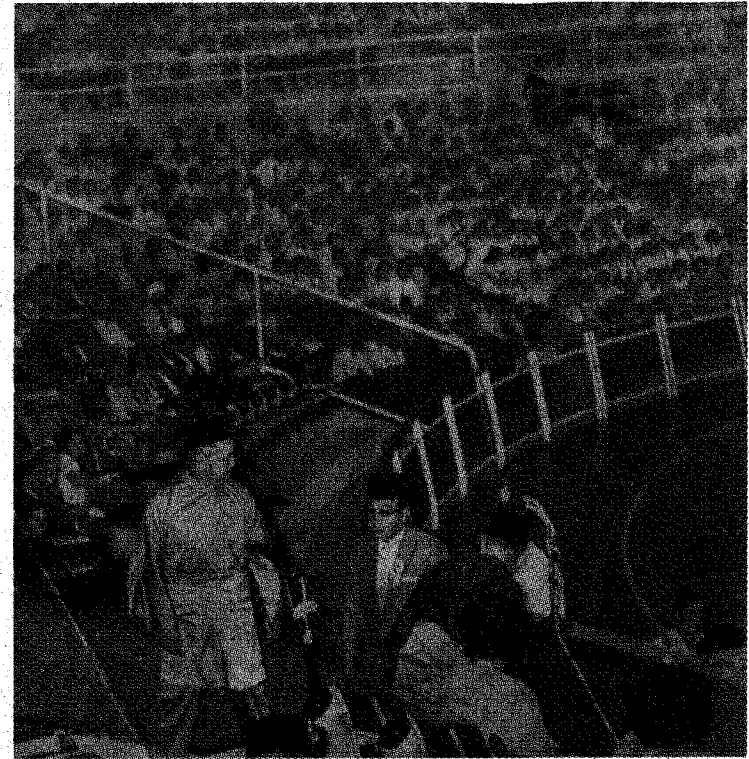
He added that both stadiums were the venue for major sporting events at local, national and international levels.

Badminton great Tan Yee Khan recalled how the national team won the first Asian Badminton Confederation Cup's team and individual titles at Stadium Negara in the Sixties.

"We also had our last Thomas Cup triumph there in 1992 after 25 years," said Tan, 66, managing director of Seaview Hotel and Resort in Pulau Pangkor. He added that he cherished memories of playing at Stadium Negara.

Sports Excel executive director Teng Mui Ngee, 62, said both stadiums were landmarks of historical value. "As both are near each other, they are ideal for centralised training for indoor as well as outdoor activities for sportsmen."

The retired Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan San Peng headmaster recalled how many schools and



The then deputy prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein (right) accompanying the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Putra Syed Hassan Jamalullail (left) at the official opening of Stadium Negara in 1962.



Former prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman at the Stadium Merdeka's official opening in 1957.

clubs in the vicinity, which did not have fields, used the stadiums as venues for games.

Malaysian Architects Association conservation and heritage committee chairman Mohamad Zulhemlee An said the government should also preserve other sporting icons like Chin Woo Stadium, located a stone's throw away from Stadium Merdeka.

Stadium Merdeka is the birthplace of modern Malaysia, having been specially built for the proclamation of independence on Aug 31, 1957.

Ironically, the stadium faced destruction in the early 1990s when

the building and land were given to a private company to construct a RM1 billion entertainment and office complex.

In exchange, the company was to construct seven other stadiums in other locations.

But a public outcry and the Asian economic crisis in 1997 put paid to the proposal.

Stadium Negara's original flat roof, with supports radiating from a central hub, was replaced with a dome in the 1980s for better acoustics, especially for concerts.

Both stadiums were declared heritage buildings in February 2003.