

Playing host to the Japanese team

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I WAS then one of those young Malayan civil servants assigned as a protocol officer to take charge of a 12-man Japanese delegation representing their government at the first Merdeka celebrations at Stadium Merdeka on Aug 31, 1957.

The Japanese delegation was the favourite of all protocol officers. I was fortunate to be chosen to take charge of the delegation which was led by The Hon Momboku Ono, the head of the Japanese Diet then. He was the only non-English speaking member of the delegation. I was sent to Singapore to study communication Japanese for this purpose.

The delegation spent altogether approximately one week before and after the Merdeka celebrations at the newly-completed Federal Hotel then. It was the



Where were you when Tunku declared Merdeka? Share your memories of this momentous event (or as related to you by your parents and grandparents) by e-mailing us at merdeka@thestar.com.my

only large hotel especially built to meet the needs of foreign dignitaries to the Merdeka celebrations. I was the second resident registered at the hotel, the first being Ms Bunney, the British lady who was assigned to Tunku Abdul Rahman as his chauffeur during his several official visits to London prior to Merdeka.

It was quite a daunting yet challenging experience to take charge of the Japanese

delegation as the anti-Japanese sentiment was still very strong then (Japanese occupation of Malaya ended Sept 12, 1945).

Besides, Ono preferred to travel in the government guest car, BE 57, with the roof open. I sat next to the driver. I had to accompany the delegation which travelled in three government-provided cars to all official functions day and night throughout their sojourn at Federal Hotel.

Traffic and crowd control was unbelievably tough, unheard of or unseen in Malaya before then. Most of the time, most of the foreign and local delegations to the official functions, including to Merdeka Stadium, were late on the morning of Aug 31.

All the same, it was indeed a special, historic and memorable experience to be part of the huge crowd to witness one of the greatest events ever recorded in our living memory.



New landmark: The Federal Hotel when it first opened in time to host the foreign dignitaries arriving for the declaration of Independence ceremony.