

Merdeka Stadium set for trip to historic past

PETALING JAYA: Work is under way to transport Merdeka Stadium back to the past – specifically 1957.

The 45,000-capacity stadium would soon be reduced to 20,000 seats, which means that several of the upper terrace blocks built over the years will be demolished, including the VIP grandstands.

A manual scoreboard will replace the electronic one while the floodlights will be upgraded. The pitch will also be made playable again.

The renovations are part of Malaysia's 50th anniversary plans to relive the historic moment when first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman proclaimed Independence at the stadium with shouts of *Merdeka!*

Merdeka Stadium has hosted many memorable events, mainly football tournaments at a time when the Malaysian sport was at its height. It was home to the prestigious Merdeka football tournaments

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from 1957 to 1995.

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali fought Joe Bugner at the stadium in 1975 watched by millions around the world.

Once renovation work is completed, the stadium will be filled with nostalgia again when the veteran footballers from Selangor and Singapore play a match on Aug 11.

Some of the players will include Santokh Singh, Khalid Ali, Soh Chin Aun, Quah Kim Song, Dollah Kassim, Samad Allapitchay, V. Sundram Moorthy, T. Pathmanathan, R. Rajagopal and Fandi Ahmad,

It was the Tunku who proposed the idea of building the stadium and the RM2.3mil landmark was completed in August 1957.

Besides its eight-lane 400m track and a central pitch for football, rugby and hockey, the stadium boasted some of the best sporting facilities at that time.