First-hand info on the Emergency period

Police personnel recount their experiences

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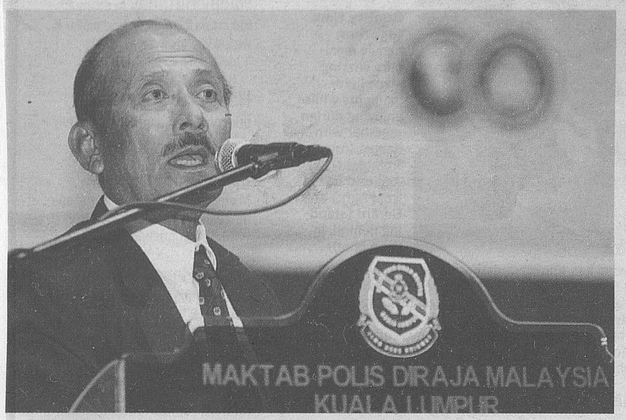
By YIP YOKE TENG
metro@thestar.com.my
Photos by AZMAN GHANI

Smart: The Federation of Malaya police officers training at the Jalan Gurney training centre, Kuala Lumpur, in 1945.



History: Haniff recounting his experiences fighting against the Communists during Emergency.

THE country' Independence did not just come about. First Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj and other founding fathers fought hard for it, thousands of others made contributions and sacrifices to achieve and sustain it. Many of these unsung heroes belonged to the Royal Malaysian Police.

From British colonialism, Japanese Occupation to the Emergency period, the 200-year-old force has helped the country ensure the safety of its people through turbulent times.

Since many of these stories were unrecorded, four former police personnel were invited to recount their experiences in relation to the force's role in achieving the country's peace and independence, at a ceremony held recently at the PDRM College in Cheras.

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan and National Archive Malaysia director-general Sidek Jamil officiated at the event. About 500 police officers heard history being recounted.

An exhibition on the subject is also being held at the college until mid-August.

Many of the speakers told of the nightmarish Emergency that brought them face to face with armed communists in the pitch darkness of the jungle.

According to history, the police force was given the mandate to defend the country's sovereignty and harmony from the threat of the Malaya Communist Party following the declaration of Emergency on June 16, 1948. The force was at that time getting back on track after the Japanese Occupation paralysed its system.

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>
> TUN MOHAMMED HANIFF OMAR

In the 12 years of Emergency, 1,346 police officers died while another 1,601 were injured. However, 10,698 communists throughout the country were killed, captured or surrendered, more than half were by the police force.

The re-emergence of Malaya Communist Party in 1968 led to the formation of the Elite Jungle Police. The battles in the jungle finally came to an end 20 years later, when the party signed an armistice with the Malaysian and Thai governments in Haadyai in 1989.

Former Inspector-General of Police Tun Mohammed Haniff Omar also recounted his experiences fighting against the Communists during Emergency.

"There were only about 9,000 police personnel at the initial stages of Emergency. The country was recovering from the Japanese occupation and the force was still in the process of getting back to form," he said.

"There was not enough equipment. Morale was low. We were only given three months of training before entering the jungles and we were not armed. The communication device battery was like that of a bicycle, it had to be recharged frequently," he recalled.

Haniff was appointed as the fourth Inspector-General of Police and served for 20 years before retiring.

In his 35-year career with the Royal Malaysian Police, he was involved in many historical events. He was one of the five members from the force who followed Tunku Abdul Rahman to the Manila Conference in association with the setting up of MAPHILINDO in 1963.

He was also among the representatives from Malaysia to attend the signing of a Peace Treaty involving the Malaya Communist Party, Malaysia and the Thai governments in Haadyai in 1989.

Paul Kiong, meanwhile said his role was to change the mindset of someone who had been a communist for 12 years within four days, and take him back to his lair where the other communists did not know he was captured.

Kiong had to do this during the second Emergency.

"All I had were just his words, that he would work with us. He could betray me any moment," he recalled.

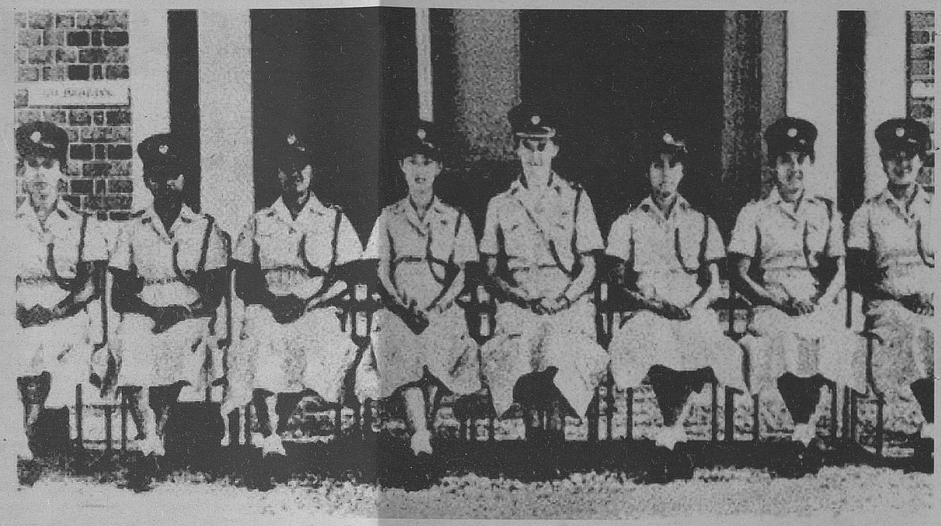
"I waited inside the car in the middle of the night, I was alone, surrounded by the pitch darkness of the jungle. If he betrayed me, I'd lose my life, there was no one else to help me," he said, adding that he was put in similar occasions several times.

Kiong said the policy of the Special Branch was to capture communists alive and bring them back to the society.

"They were good persons, just had the wrong ideology. We had to heal them like we were doctors."

On a mission: A file picture of special constables in an operation during the Emergency.

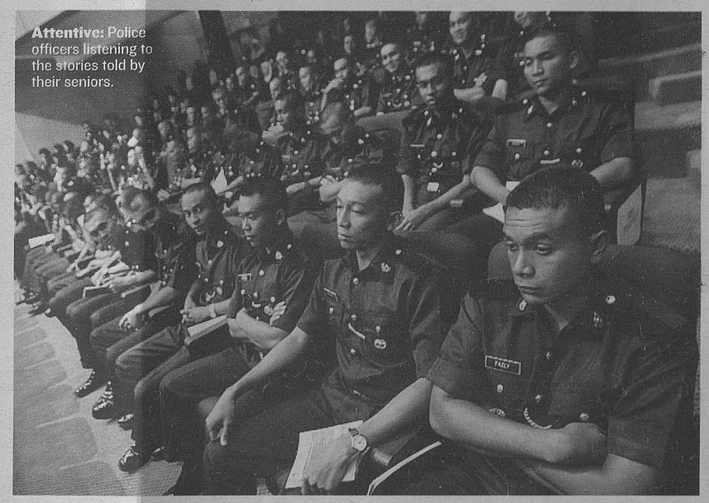
Aris: During the Emergency, he was in charge of one of the jungle squads.



Pioneers: A file picture of the first batch of women inspectors. Kairunisa is on the far left.

Kiong: Was a policeman for 31 years.

Kairunisa: One of the first women inspectors in the country.



Attentive: Police officers listening to the stories told by their seniors.

Watchful: The Malayan police on patrol during the fight against the communists.

Fortunately, all his assessments were correct, none of the captured communists betrayed him. Many of them are now among his best friends. They visit each other's houses with their families and celebrate festivals together. They are also grateful to the government.

"I asked them why they would work with me. They said because I trusted them and dared to risk my life to go back to their bases," he recalled.

The then 30-something was in and out of the jungle for six years; the longest period was eight months.

Merdeka holds a special meaning to Kiong who was a policeman for 31 years.

"I am very happy. I tell myself that what we enjoy now is the result of hard work and I feel proud that I had partly contributed to that," he said.

The 63-year-old wants the future generation to remember the struggle for Independence.

"Don't take the peace and security for granted. All must play a part to preserve it," he said.

Meanwhile, Aris Musa, born in 1921, was a police officer who saw the development of the force through four eras.

He started serving before World War 2 as a "Mata-Mata" in the Johore State Police, then during the Japanese Occupation when he was required to fight bandits in jungles.

When the British took over, Aris was retrained as a policeman in Johor Baru. During the Emergency, he was in charge of one of the jungle squads.

He retired from PDRM in 1976, after serving in the force for 36 years.

There were numerous life-endangering perils, including a mission to arrest an axe-welding murderer. However, two shootings, one with notorious robbery gang Harimau Malaya and the other with a group of six communists, are etched most deeply in his memory.

"The Harimau Malaya gang had five men and two women. They opened fire when we raided the house they were in. Two of them died and we managed to capture the others alive," he reminisced.

"Then there was this time when our group of 10 men came face to face with six communists in the jungle and shootings ensued. One of them died and we caught the rest.

"Funny though, I did not know how dangerous it was until the whole thing was over," he added.

On the day of Merdeka, Aris celebrated the occasion with his friends in Kluang. He felt proud and sad.

"It reminded me of my old friends who had died fighting for the country's peace."

Kairunisa Karim, 75, was one of the first women inspectors in the country. She was working as the secretary for the Chairman Committee of Review before joining the force in 1955.

"People thought I was crazy. I was doing a job that paid me RM800 a month and chose to be a women inspector instead with a monthly salary of RM180," she said with a smile.

"The pay was not important to me. I was an outdoors person, I was very excited about my new job," she added.

The training for women inspectors was two months longer than that for men, to pick up skills to handle juveniles and female criminals. The training sessions are memorable for Kairunisa due to the lack of facilities.

"We had to learn swimming in an abandoned mining pool, where there were snakes.

After the training, she was based in Ipoh and dealt mostly with investigative works. In mid-1956, she was appointed as Inspector Area.

However, in September 1957, she had to leave the force and went to London with her husband to pursue law studies. She considers herself lucky that she was still in her country when it celebrated its independence.

"I was in Tapah then. All the police officers put on their uniforms and marched in the field. I still remember how my heart was filled with emotion as I saw the Union Jack being lowered and our Jalur Gemilang being raised."

She urged the young generation to cherish what they had, as the country before and after Merdeka were worlds apart.

"Before Merdeka, we didn't have the opportunities we have now. We were the second-grade citizens. Not only top posts were taken by the British, we were not allowed into many places, including the restrooms, even police personnel," she added.