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Proud to be Malaysian

A 'guest' reporter who found his home here

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PETALING JAYA: He was a reporter from Singapore "parachuted" to Malaya for a few months to cover the birth of a nation.

However, Felix Abisheganaden, 84, had such an enriching experience that he took up citizenship in 1965 after Singapore split from Malaysia.

He brought his wife and four children along.

Felix said the momentum leading to the Independence declaration started months earlier.

A contest was held to choose the national anthem.

"Tunku (Abdul Rahman) personally listened to the short-listed songs.

"He rejected hundreds of songs because they had marching tunes. Tunku said Malaya was a peaceful nation and not about to go to war with any country.

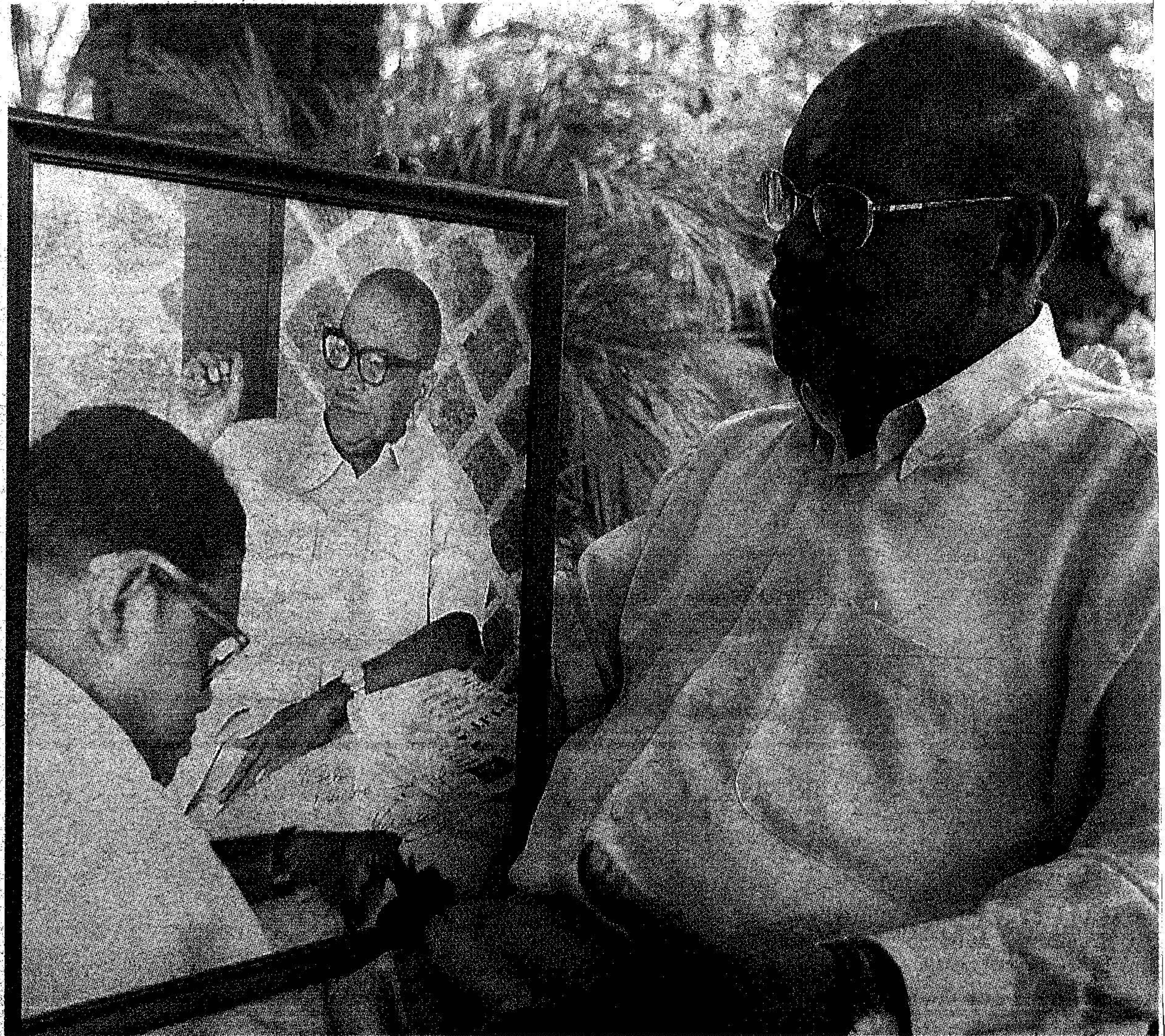
"He chose *Terang Bulan* as the national anthem because it was a love tune," said Felix, now a public relations consultant.

Felix said Tunku's administration dealt with social issues that were not much different from today's.

For example, the dilemma of introducing the condom as a part of family planning for society was a touchy subject then as it is now.

"We asked Tunku how he would get rural folks to accept the condom? Tunku was silent for a while, then replied that it would not be easy.

"Tunku said the rural folks were good Muslims. They would put on the condoms as required, but they would later cut a hole on it.



Memorable experience: Felix showing a picture of him interviewing Tunku Abdul Rahman whom he described as a leader who loved life and his people.

"We all broke out laughing but we knew Tunku loved people dearly," said Felix, adding that the people loved him as much.

Felix remembers some 10,000 people making their way to the Selangor Club Padang (now Dataran Merdeka) to join the countdown on the night of Aug 30, 1957.

When the clock struck midnight, shouts of Merdeka! resounded.

"Malays, Chinese, Indians reached out to clasp the hands of those next

to them in sheer happiness.

"Standing in the midst of such happiness, I knew I belonged here. Even the Europeans at the Selangor Club balcony were caught up in the frenzy," said Felix.

By then, excited Umno Youth members had hoisted Tunku on their shoulders, many shouting Bapa Malaysia.

"Before that, there had been reference to Tunku as Bapa Malaysia, but never as collectively, or as loud, as

the chants at the padang.

"That sealed the title for Tunku, that night, he was officially acknowledged in history as the Father for the country," said Felix.

Felix has never regretted his decision to become a Malaysian.

"The country is the legacy from a group of multiracial leaders sincere in wanting to build a noteworthy country.

"It is up to us to keep alive the spirit of '57," he said.