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Golden opportunity to attend event

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THAT was a momentous occasion, the first Merdeka celebration at Stadium Merdeka on Aug 31 1957, and it has lived with me throughout my life.

I was a junior civil servant attached to the District Office in Segamat, Johor. I was lucky to be given a coupon by my MCA friend to attend the Merdeka celebration.

There were four of us. We were very excited to have the golden opportunity to attend such a historic event, to celebrate the proclamation of independence of our beloved Malaya by none other than the great statesman Tunku Abdul Rahman.

We hired a car to make the journey to Kuala Lumpur. We left Johor

at about 3.30am and arrived at the stadium car park at 7am.

We lined up with thousands of other people and made our way slowly into the stadium. We were very lucky to be given seats directly opposite the dais where the Tunku would stand and read the proclamation of independence.

It was a fine day. The stadium was packed with people from the four corners of Malaya and abroad. We waited eagerly for the proud moment. Though the day was getting warmer as the sun rose in the sky, it did not bother us much.

Invited guests, senior government officials and other dignitaries arrived to take their seats followed by political leaders, government

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

ministers, the British High Commissioner and lastly Tunku Abdul Rahman.

On the dais in the centre of the stadium were seated the Malay Rulers, the British High Commissioner and the Tunku, our Father of Independence, supported by

umbrella and kris bearers. The Malay Rulers and the Tunku were resplendent in their Malay baju and headgear, and the British High Commissioner in white uniform and hat. They looked so solemn and dignified.

The British High Commissioner began proceedings by conveying a congratulatory message from HRH Queen Elizabeth II to the people of Malaya for achieving independence in peace and harmony, and wished the people and Government of Malaya success and a bright future.

The Tunku began by thanking the people of various races in the country for their unity and support in gaining independence for the country without bloodshed. He

outlined the path taken and various obstacles that had to be overcome in gaining independence from the British. He called on the people of Malaya to put their full energies and resources to build a successful, progressive and prosperous nation that we can all be proud of.

He then raised a clenched fist and shouted "Merdeka" loudly several times, and the huge crowd in the stadium spontaneously repeated after him. My friends and I joined in the call of "Merdeka" with great enthusiasm and joy.

It was such a proud day for the people of Malaya. Though my friends and I were there on empty stomachs, we did not feel hungry or tired. Perhaps it was the spirit of nationhood that gave us strength and courage to make our way home to Segamat.