

When two lorries provided the stage

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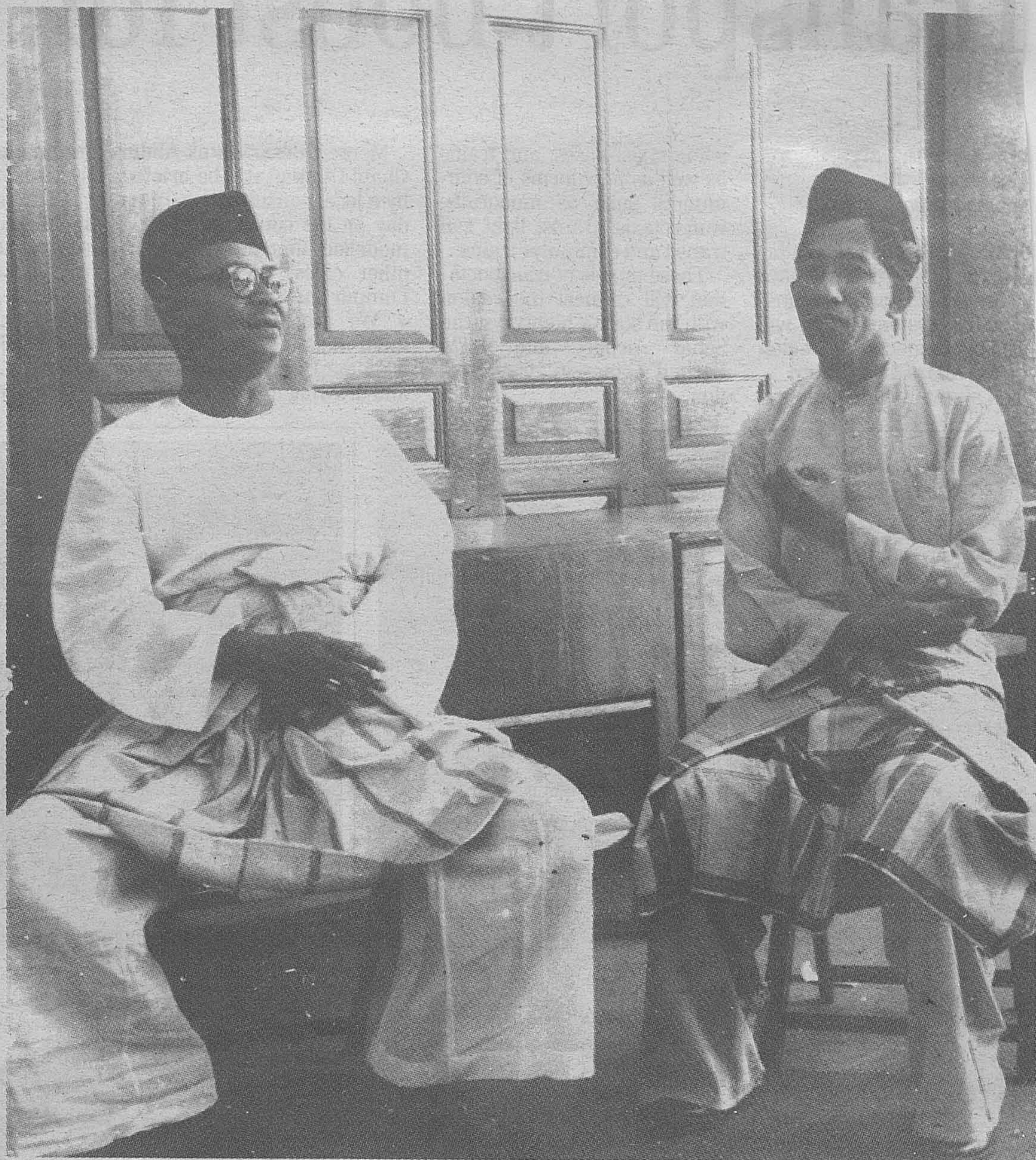
It was not the frills that mattered but the occasion and how the people responded to the announcement on Merdeka. An Umno veteran relates to **P. SELVARANI** the events of that historic day



Datuk Borhan Md Yaman was involved in many pre-Merdeka events

be seen as well as heard loud and clear.

Datuk Borhan Md Yaman, 78, vividly recollects the day Malaysians learnt they would become a free people, 51 years ago: "We



Tunku Abdul Rahman (left) and Borhan Md Yaman during a Malacca Umno meeting at the Meng Seng Charitable Association Hall in 1966. — Pictures courtesy of Datuk Borhan Md Yaman

borrowed two lorries from a Chinese towkay, pulled the side and back wooden panels down, put the vehicles back to back and we had a stage."

It was Feb 20, 1956 and Borhan was a 27-year-old teacher and secretary of the Malacca Umno division.

"It was a great honour for us to

host such a historic event."

The idea to get Tunku to announce the date of independence in Malacca was mooted by the Kuala Kangsar Umno branch on the grounds that Malaya should rise from the very place the Malacca empire fell.

And there was no better venue than the Banda Hilir padang at

the foot of the ruins of the once mighty Portuguese fortress, the A Famosa.

Borhan remembers that morning as a refreshing day following a pre-dawn shower.

As dawn broke, it became bright and sunny, welcoming the swelling crowd at the padang, some of whom had camped overnight to make sure they heard the historic proclamation.

(Tun) Ghafar Baba, the Malacca Umno division chief, was chairman of the organising committee, while Borhan took charge of the welcoming sub-committee.

"We did not have the kind of money parties now have for such major events.

"We had to make do with whatever we had and had to dig into our own pockets," Borhan relates during a recent interview at his home in Klebang Besar, Malacca.

Tunku and his delegation arrived at the Batu Berendam airport in Malacca from London via Singapore that morning and a motorcade took them to Banda Hilir.

The Malacca Umno Youth members, who were mostly teachers, were on motorcycles and they led Tunku's motorcade from the airport to Banda Hilir.

"I was at the padang awaiting the arrival of the motorcade.

THERE was little money around to make elaborate preparations for that important announcement but the special Malacca committee rose to the occasion.

Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj was scheduled to announce the date of Malaya's independence at the Banda Hilir Padang along the Malacca seafront and a crowd of 100,000 was expected.

The organising committee, made up of members from the Alliance (now Barisan Nasional) coalition, had to think on its feet. Tunku and his delegation had to



The eager crowd awaiting Tunku's arrival at the Banda Hilir Padang. In the background is the old Malacca Club building, which now houses the Independence Proclamation Memorial.

"It was amazing as people from all walks of life, and many from other parts of the country, had turned up to hear Tunku's announcement.

"The place was packed. Those without a view of the 'stage' clambered onto nearby buildings and rain trees to get a glimpse of Tunku and his delegation.

"As Tunku and his delegation arrived at the padang in a red (Nash Metropolitan) convertible (borrowed from another Chinese businessman), the crowd became euphoric."

Tunku announced that Malaya would be independent on Aug 31, 1957.

A Malacca Umno Kaum Ibu (women's movement) representative then presented Tunku with a kris. He lifted the kris in the air and shouted "Merdeka" several times.

"We were to be free after nearly 400 years of being colonised," says Borhan.

Despite the occasion, Borhan

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says there was no feasting or merry-making.

"We couldn't even afford a tea party for the dignitaries.

"I remember that Tunku and his delegation adjourned to (Tun) Tan Cheng Lock's house in Heeren Street for refreshments before flying back to Kuala Lumpur."

As Malacca Umno secretary, Borhan was one of the three party members invited to attend the proclamation of independence at Merdeka Stadium.

The other two were Ghafar and Malacca Umno treasurer Johar Aziz.

Borhan, his wife Maimunah Mohd Shah, and Johar and his wife travelled to Kuala Lumpur together. They did not own a car and Johar hired a taxi driven by Sidang Atu of Bukit Lintang in Air Molek.

"We were at the Selangor Club padang on the eve of Merdeka to witness the lowering of the Union Jack and the hoisting of the Malayan flag at the stroke of midnight."

Tunku then proudly proclaimed to the world that "we

are now a nation!"

After the proclamation, the two couples sought accommodation for the night.

"We discovered that every hotel in Batu Road (Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman) such as the KK Hotel, New Hotel and Tivoli Hotel were fully booked.

"It was about 2am then. Just as we were wondering if we'd have to sleep in a mosque or in the open, a young man came up and offered to put us up in his *pondok* (hut).

"It was a small pondok in a rubber estate opposite the Lady Templer Hospital in Cheras.

"It rained heavily the next morning and we were shivering as we took our bath with water drawn from a nearby well.

"We then dressed in our finest *songket*, and Sidang Atu drove us to Merdeka Stadium."

At the stadium, the Tunku read the proclamation of independence and raised his hand and called "Merdeka!" seven times, and each time the crowd responded.

Despite not climbing the ranks of the political ladder, Borhan's love for the party and the country never waned.

"In those days we did not harbour ambitions of becoming prominent or rich. We served to defend the sovereignty of the country and race.

"We did it with a sincere heart and not for positions or wealth."

Borhan was also involved in many pre-independence events, such as the famous gathering at the Meng Seng Hall in Malacca in 1955, where money was collected to finance Tunku's delegation to London to negotiate for federal elections.

"We organised many activities in Malacca to raise funds. We also staged a *bangsawan* and at the function I was given the task of auctioning off some *bunga telur*.

"The last *bunga telur* was bought by sub-inspector Minhat Bachik of Parit Melana for \$30. It was quite a tidy sum.

"When I asked him why he had paid so much, he replied it was because he was angry with the British for not promoting him to inspector despite serving the force well for many years.

"Instead, they brought in a Briton, who had served in Palestine and appointed him as inspector."

Borhan says people from all walks of life, rich and poor, donated to the Merdeka cause.

The rich sold their property and jewellery but the contribution of the poorer folk was no less significant.

Tappers donated their day's collection. Others sold their livestock, padi and coconuts and donated the money.

"I hope the younger generation will appreciate the sacrifices that were made and uphold the country's sovereignty and unity that our leaders fought hard to achieve."