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Story behind the picture

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Memory of Tunku before Merdeka



Captured for posterity: Shaik Ali showing the autographed copy of the photograph that he took of Tunku during a rally in Nibong Tebal on Feb 17, 1957, when he tried to garner support for the Alliance party.

By **DERRICK VINESH**
derrickvinesh@thestar.com.my

BUTTERWORTH: Visitors to Shaik Ali Md Hussain's house in Jalan Telaga here will not miss the old photograph in the hall.

Shaik Ali's wedding photographs and other family ones adorn the wall but the one that stands out shows Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra 50 years ago.

The picture, taken on Feb 17, 1957, shows the Tunku standing on a table and addressing a crowd using a microphone in Nibong Tebal.

In it are former Penang Governor Tun Sardon Jubir and business tycoons Tan Cheng Bee and N.T.S Arumugam Pillai.

"Tunku spoke about a forthcoming rural election and urged the people to come out and support the Alliance Party candidate.

"He also said that it was vital to ensure that a local wins the election as the country was preparing for independence on Aug 31 the same year," Shaik Ali, 73, said.

The retired Royal Australian Air Force clerk said he later met Tunku in his Ayer Rajah Road home in Penang on Sept 15, 1987, and presented him with an enlarged copy of the photograph.

"Tunku was extremely delighted and remarked that my photograph was probably among the few taken of him several months before the first National Day.

"He autographed another copy of the photo-



Malaysiaku Gemilang

graph for me. I have since framed and hung it in my house," he said, adding that he would often relate the story behind the picture to his 13 grandchildren.

Recollecting his Merdeka Day experience, Shaik Ali said he joined about 30 colleagues from the Butterworth Brickworks Company at a special dinner and dance.

"The guys used empty oil drums and pails as musical instruments as we sang many *joget* numbers.

"Since we could not find any ladies at that time, some guys sportingly wore women's clothes to dance with the guys," he added.

Shaik Ali noted that back then the Merdeka celebrations, especially in Nibong Tebal, were rather quiet as not many could afford lavish parties.

"Many stayed up the whole day listening to the radio, which highlighted the celebrations in different parts of the country," he said.