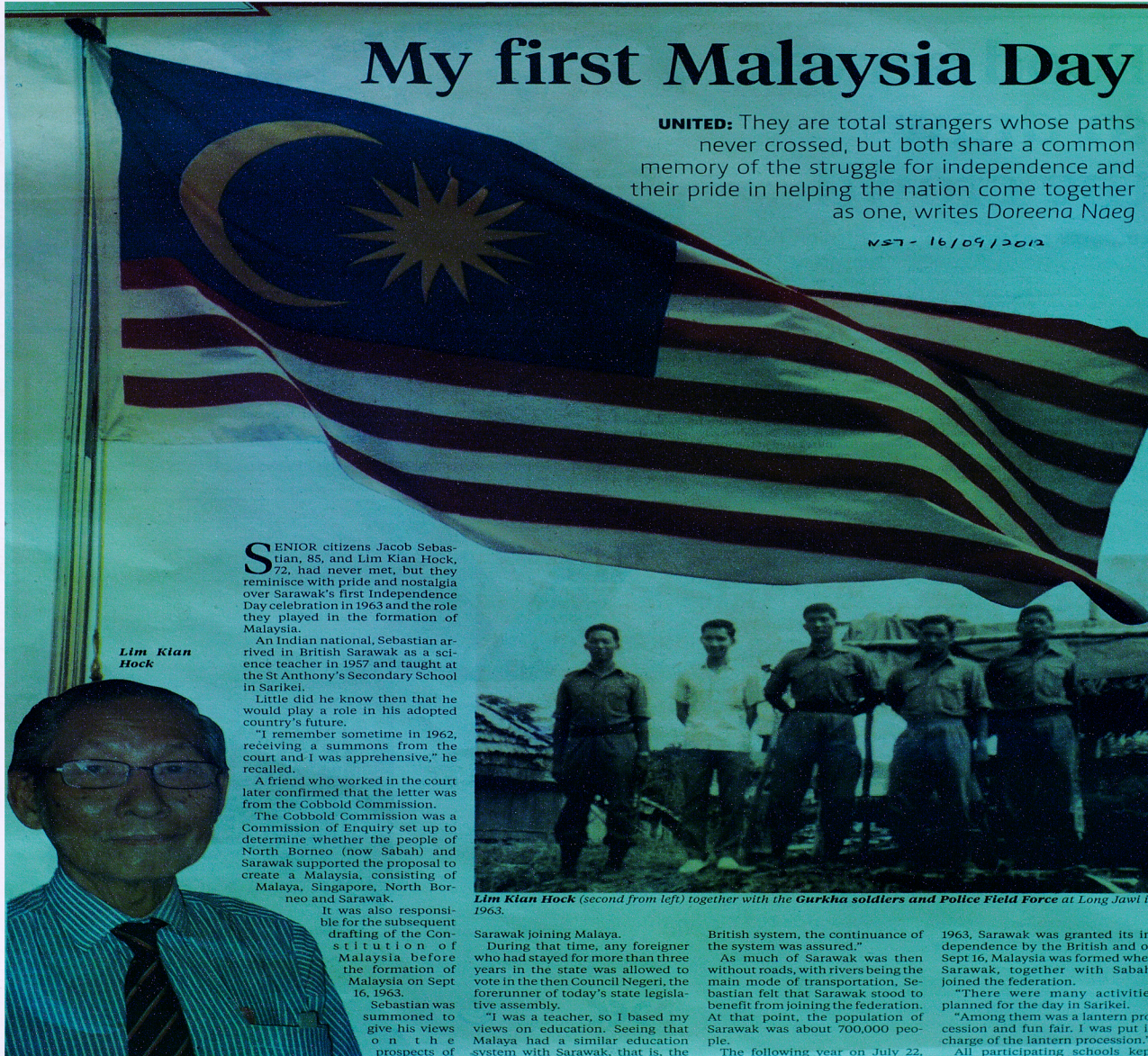


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My first Malaysia Day

UNITED: They are total strangers whose paths never crossed, but both share a common memory of the struggle for independence and their pride in helping the nation come together as one, writes Doreena Naeg

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Lim Kian Hock

SENIOR citizens Jacob Sebastian, 85, and Lim Kian Hock, 72, had never met, but they reminisce with pride and nostalgia over Sarawak's first Independence Day celebration in 1963 and the role they played in the formation of Malaysia.

An Indian national, Sebastian arrived in British Sarawak as a science teacher in 1957 and taught at the St Anthony's Secondary School in Sarikel.

Little did he know then that he would play a role in his adopted country's future.

"I remember sometime in 1962, receiving a summons from the court and I was apprehensive," he recalled.

A friend who worked in the court later confirmed that the letter was from the Cobbold Commission.

The Cobbold Commission was a Commission of Enquiry set up to determine whether the people of North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sarawak supported the proposal to create a Malaysia, consisting of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak.

It was also responsible for the subsequent drafting of the Constitution of Malaysia before the formation of Malaysia on Sept 16, 1963.

Sebastian was summoned to give his views on the prospects of Sarawak joining Malaya.



Lim Kian Hock (second from left) together with the Gurkha soldiers and Police Field Force at Long Jawi in 1963.

During that time, any foreigner who had stayed for more than three years in the state was allowed to vote in the then Council Negeri, the forerunner of today's state legislative assembly.

"I was a teacher, so I based my views on education. Seeing that Malaya had a similar education system with Sarawak, that is, the

British system, the continuance of the system was assured." As much of Sarawak was then without roads, with rivers being the main mode of transportation, Sebastian felt that Sarawak stood to benefit from joining the federation. At that point, the population of Sarawak was about 700,000 people. The following year on July 22,

1963, Sarawak was granted its independence by the British and on Sept 16, Malaysia was formed when Sarawak, together with Sabah, joined the federation. "There were many activities planned for the day in Sarikel. "Among them was a lantern procession and fun fair. I was put in charge of the lantern procession." All participating schools kept

their lanterns at St Anthony's and Sebastian kept them under lock and key in the science laboratory.

He distinctly remembered locking the door before heading home the night before.

Tragedy struck when Sebastian checked on the lanterns the next day. Every one of them was slashed and torn to shreds by vandals. There was no way the procession could carry on.

Apart from the act of vandalism, there were other calamities. And the culprits were the communist insurgents.

The objective of the communists was achieved — the residents were petrified and the celebration was cancelled.

Finally on Sept 16, the Declaration of Independence was read.

"My wife and I were at the park to listen to the declaration. With my firstborn in my arms, I remembered feeling apprehensive.

"I looked over my shoulders for any attacks. We were all on our toes, all alert, waiting to take cover should any unwarranted attack occur."

For Lim, the road to independence was more treacherous.

Before Independence, Lim was stationed in Kanowit as the administrative probationer officer responsible for voter registration in rural areas.

He was also involved in the Lord Landoone Inter-Government Committee of Inquiry in October 1962 where he witnessed first-hand the Ibans' paramount chief Tun Temenggong Jugah Barieng's forceful deliberation on the interest of his community and the resolution of the Iban chiefs gathering in Kapit.

Though he was stationed so deep in the interior in Kanowit, Lim never imagined he would be caught in a revolt that opposed the formation of the Federation of Malaysia — the Brunei Rebellion.

The rebellion was led by Bruneian A.M. Azahari, who after living in Indonesia for a long time, had the sympathy of Indonesia.

The rebellion was seen as one of the first stages of the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation (1962-1966).

"I had my first taste of war when I had to safeguard the shotguns at the Machan and Kanowit police stations."

He was also tasked with escorting the British army's security patrols to Machan, Julau, Meluan and Ulu Pakan.

As expected, the rebellion never reached Kanowit. But the subsequent military confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia did.

When Lim was transferred to Belaga, a small administrative border outpost, as the administrative officer in charge, he was brought closer to the war.

Belaga sits close to the Sarawak-Kalimantan border.

Lim then was entrusted with the overall administration of the outpost.

Things could not get any worse when he encountered the onslaught of the Confrontation with daily incursions. The Confrontation started with an attack on Tebedu, a border town in Serian on April 12, 1962.

"I recall the Resident (chief administrator of an area) A.H. Griffin, called me via radio from Sibu to give me moral support as I was literally holding the fort during that tumultuous time. I promised to do the best I could to protect Belaga."

That was a curious thing to say though, because Belaga did not have a police force.

Its security solely depended on 1 Home Guards armed with shotgun platoon of Gurkha riflemen stationed downstream from the town.

"Twenty miles those days was 10 miles. I was naturally apprehensive of rampant sightings of Indon along the border and the frequent of mortar shelling."

One action Lim was proud of was capture of a group of Indonesian intelligence agents who were linked to TNKU (Tentera Nasional Kalimantan) — the military arm of Azahari's Brunei People's Party.

"I was suspicious of them and act my gut feelings. I alerted the police. They were detained and it confirmed my fears that they were linked to the TNKU."

The attempted infiltration beefed the armed forces in Long Jawi. Even villagers were involved in safeguarding their respective longhouses.

"They would inform us of any attacks," said Lim.

Despite the hostilities, the format of the Federation of Malaysia continued.

On Sept 15, 1962 the Union Jack lowered at Belaga's Fort Vyner for the time.

A small gathering of community leaders, officials and British army representatives congregated at the fort to witness the raising of the Mal flag.

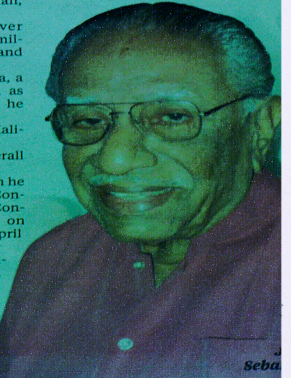
But the TNKU's attacks continued unabated.

Lim remembered that the height of border fighting in Belaga was the Indonesian attack on the Long Jawi outpost, defended by a handful of Gurkha soldiers, Border Scouts and Police Force paramilitary personnel, on Sept 1963.

The Indonesian regular soldiers of the outpost, killing a Gurkha soldier, Field Force man and capturing nine Border Scouts.

A counterattack by the Gurkhas out the attacking force and put an end to the TNKU and Indonesian incursions at the border there.

Peace finally came for Lim and the state on the road to independence.



Seba