

## When Rukun Negara echoed for the first time



**Heart of the nation:** A cleaner wiping a wall featuring the Rukun Negara at Merdeka MRT Station in Kuala Lumpur. - SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

**KUALA LUMPUR:** At the 14th National Day celebration 53 years ago, a 21-year-old student from Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM, now UiTM) was entrusted to lead the first recitation of the Rukun Negara pledge.

This historic event took place on Aug 31, 1971, a year after the Rukun Negara was introduced to strengthen the unity of Malaysians following the tragedy of May 13, 1969.

Although this is less known, Kamarudin Ibrahim, now 74, remains proud of being honoured with the task in front of the then Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Almarhum Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, the second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein and thousands of Malaysians.

Recalling the events, the Perak

native from Batu Kurau said he was in a lecture hall when an administrative officer informed him that someone wanted to see him.

"At that time, we didn't have phones. While I was walking down from the fourth floor lecture room to the office, many thoughts crossed my mind - was it bad news from my hometown?"

"When I entered the office, there were two people who introduced themselves as members of the National Day celebration committee.

"They said I was nominated as one of the candidates to lead the recitation.

"I was quite shocked, especially since I had no prior experience in public speaking," he said in a recent programme aired by RTM,

Bernama reported.

After being shortlisted with two or three other candidates, they were sent to the ITM language lab before he was asked to go to RTM for intensive training in public speaking, voice projection, body posture and intonation.

"During my training, there was an officer who guided me. He taught me to keep my sentences short because thousands of Malaysians would be following along.

"In front of me were the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the prime minister, ministers and representatives from neighbouring countries, so I couldn't afford to make mistakes.

"I was also instructed on how to maintain my posture and was advised to focus straight ahead while reciting the pledge."

On that historic day, Kamarudin confidently and proudly stepped onto the stage in front of all the dignitaries to recite the Rukun Negara for the first time.

Kamarudin also shared that the event instilled a deep love for the country, and even though he has living in Brunei for nearly 34 years, he still watches the live broadcast of the National Day celebrations to recall the moment when he led the first recitation of the Rukun Negara.

He also believes that by adhering firmly to the principles of the Rukun Negara, the people of Malaysia, regardless of race, can achieve harmony and stability.

"The principles contained in the Rukun Negara must not only be appreciated but also practised in daily life," Kamarudin added.