

Hurray for Harry
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When pretty Catherine Loh was elected Miss Malaysia last April, the pert beauty from the oil-rich British protectorate of Brunei fully expected to preside over the independence ceremonies of the newly formed Federation of Malaysia. But that was before Brunei withdrew from the planned federation in a state of pique, leaving Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo to go it alone. Brunei's defection not only left this week's joyous celebrations without a beauty queen but it also took Malaysia out of the running for the Miss Universe contest.

The beauty queen flap was low on the list of last-minute labor pains attending the long-awaited birth of Malaysia. At the insistence of Indonesia's belligerent President Sukarno, who bitterly opposes the federation, Malaysia's independence had been postponed two weeks beyond the original Aug. 31 starting date, while a United Nations team investigated whether or not North Borneo and Sarawak really wanted to join. Hoping to influence opinion against federation, Sukarno began moving paratroopers into Indonesian Borneo along his 900-mile-long border with the two territories. Some Indonesian guerrillas even sneaked through the jungles into Sarawak to stir up trouble; they were relentlessly hunted down by tough little British army Gurkhas, aided by half-naked Iban tribesmen, who hung up at least one Indonesian head in the rafters of their longhouses.

Fearful that Indonesia might extract further delays out of Malaya's easygoing Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, the architect of the federation, Singapore's brilliant, shifty Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who regards Sukarno as "an international blackmailer," swung into action. Flying to Sarawak and North Borneo, "Harry" Lee picked up the chief ministers of both territories and brought them back to Kuala Lumpur to stiffen up the Tunku. Britain's Commonwealth Secretary Duncan Sandys was also on hand, working hard to get agreement. Threatening to declare Singapore an independent state, Lee pressured Abdul Rahman into holding firm for the federation's Sept. 16 deadline.

Last week the final obstacle to independence was cleared away when the U.N.'s Malaysia team reported that both North Borneo and Sarawak favored the federation. As the new nation prepared to unfurl its red-and-white-striped flag, Harry Lee was quick to capitalize on the occasion. With his popularity at its zenith for his major role in bringing the federation about, he scheduled immediate elections in Singapore.

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