

Man behind Tunku's moving speeches

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ALOR STAR: The process of gaining independence for Malaya took a great deal of blood, sweat and tears.

One who knows this best is former journalist Tan Sri Azahari Taib who wrote numerous speeches for Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, our first Prime Minister.

The former elected representative was chosen for his linguistic and journalistic skills, to pen the words that would help gain the nation freedom.

As the Tunku spoke to thousands across the length and breadth of the country, he had Azahari, and other speech writers to thank for speeches that swayed people towards nationhood.

And, of course, Azahari was there the night the Union Jack was lowered and a new flag hoisted, marking a new future.

Azahari chokes with emotion as he recalls that moment.

He'd knelt down and kissed the ground at the Selangor Club field after the clock

struck midnight on Aug 30, 1957.

"Tears welled up in my eyes and I said a prayer, thanking God for his gift of independence."

Azahari, then 33 and Baling State Assemblyman, had made a spontaneous decision that day to drive to Kuala Lumpur from here.

He stayed with a doctor friend, but barely slept that night. Instead he spent the night chatting with his friend about independence.

"How could anyone sleep through it? A people's dream had become reality."

Early the next day, Azahari and a group of friends drove to Stadium Merdeka at 6am where a huge crowd had already gathered.

After breakfast of *nasi goreng* near the stadium, they took their seats sitting as close to the stage as possible to hear Tunku speak.

Azahari remembers the shouts of "Merdeka" reverberating through the stadium.

When the cheers ended, everyone was hugging everyone else.

Despite the elation, Azahari was afraid of the future and what it would be like.



Azahari disagrees that Independence was served by the British on a silver platter.

"Would the future leaders carry their responsibilities well?"

He disagreed that the British "served" independence on a silver platter.

"Many men and women died while serving with the Homeguards in the fight against the Communists. My brother-in-law Khalid was shot in the jungles of Kulim in

the early 50s."

Khalid was the one who encouraged Azahari's family to join the Homeguards.

"Barely six months in the Homeguards, Khalid was dead. I remember my sister, Khalid's wife, telling me: 'Are you happy now? He died for the country.'"

Azahari still finds it difficult to talk about the sacrifices that

so many made for the country.

Forty nine years after the day, Azahari who has 30 grandchildren, is critical about the younger generation.

"The older generation of Malaysians fought for independence and now it's up to the new generation to continue that struggle. We have provided them the tools. They have to fulfill their duty."