

Retiree's RM3.8m collection

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MALACCA: Senior citizen Lee Swee Kok wants to sell his six sets of first day covers commemorating Merdeka 49 years ago for a whopping RM3.8mil.

Lee, 80, said four sets of the first day covers were issued by the British on Aug 21, 1957. The fifth set marked the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj's declaration of Merdeka on Aug 31, 1957, while the sixth set dated Aug 31, 1958, celebrated the installation of the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

According to Lee, the transition of power from the British to Malaysians was completed on Aug 19, 1957 – one-and-a-half years after the first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman announced the Proclamations of Independence in Bandar Hilir on Feb 20, 1956.

"Because Aug 19 was a Saturday, the first day cover had to come out on Monday, the 21st, which was the first working day of the week, as Sunday was a rest day," he said in an interview at his house in Taman Kota Laksamana here.

Lee, who was a secretary to the late MCA leader Tun Tan Siew Sin at his company from 1950 to 1952, said the first day covers sold out fast when they were released and he had failed to purchase any. He waited for 26 years before a friend sold him the first day covers.

To prove the authenticity of the Aug 21 first day cover, he pointed out that the stamps had the registered Malacca post mark, the post office seals, date and Malacca marks. "The word *Merdeka*, the flags of all the states that made up the Federation of Malaya, and stamps ranging from one cent to five dollars are proof that they are Merdeka covers," he said.

Lee claimed that he got Christie's of London to evaluate his six sets of first day covers and the auction house set the total value at RM3.8mil.

He feels that the National Archives should buy the stamps from him, "otherwise part of Merdeka history would be missing without the first day cover featuring Aug 21, 1957."



VALUED SETS: Lee showing his collection of first day covers commemorating Merdeka 49 years ago.