

# All races made Merdeka a reality

In our run-up to Merdeka 2007 in August, we will be featuring the fight for independence as Tunku wrote it in his "As I See It" column in *The Star*. This selected article (Dec 3, 1981) describes the developments that led to the quest for independence.

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**W**HEN the war ended, we faced more trouble. It was rumoured that Malaya would be ceded to General Chiang Kai-shek. Another story had it that Chiang Kai-shek was a spent force and that Mao Tse-tung would take over.

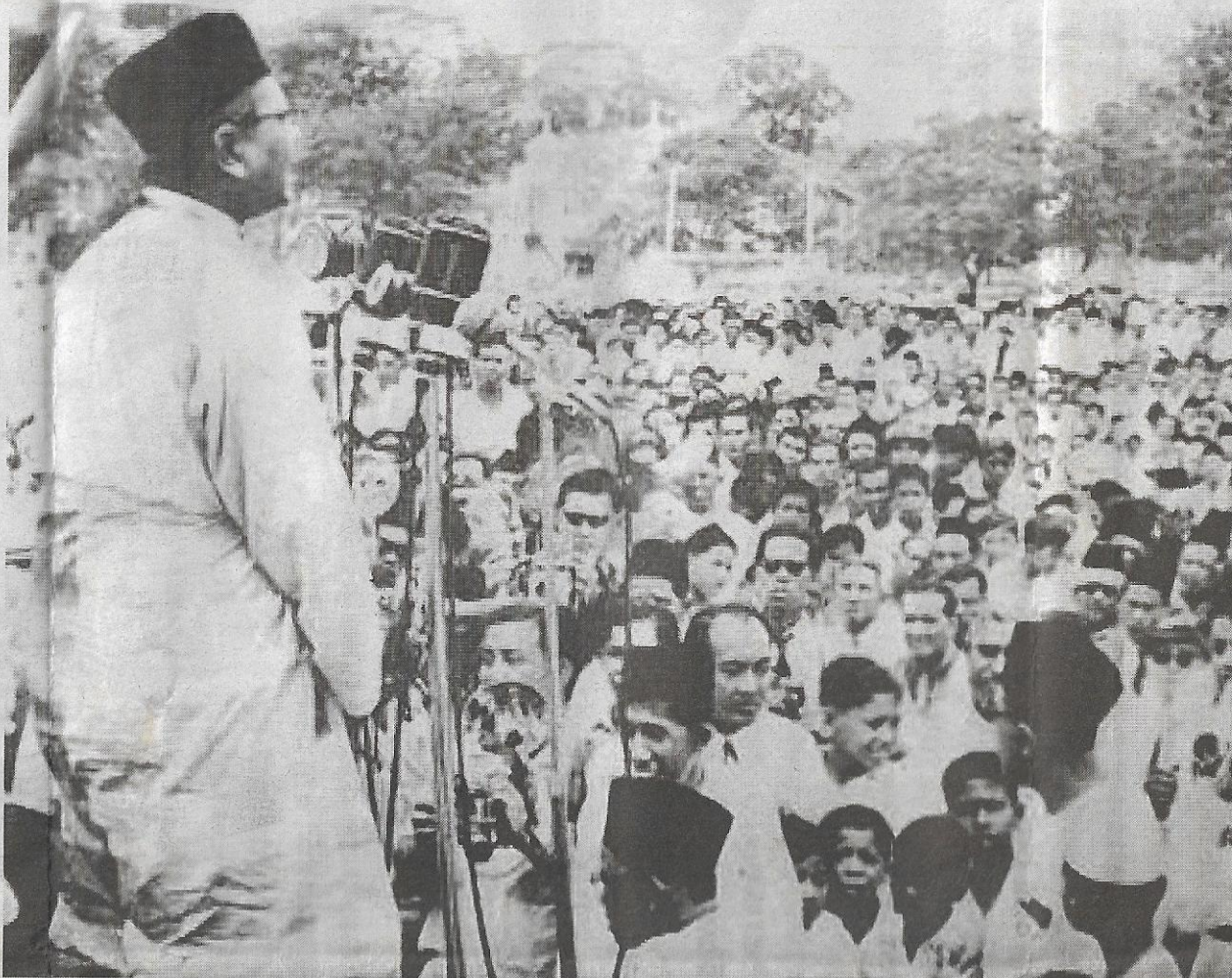
All these stories made the people of Kedah very worried and nervous.

At that time, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) started to take control of some Kedah districts. Although they did not harm the Malays, they took their revenge on those Chinese who worked with the Japanese.

Some Malays and Indians who had gone out of their way to collaborate with the Japanese were also made to pay.

The Malays in Alor Star decided to prevent communist takeover at all cost. It was then, with great relief, we heard that the Malay Force 136 had set up their headquarters at Kuala Nerang. Two of my nephews who had parachuted into the area, Tunku Osman who later became a general and Tunku Yusof Tunku Kassim, were among them.

In the meantime, I had visited kampungs with Haji Hussein Dol and called upon the people to be ready to defend Alor Star. The response was good. Some government servants from Perak and Kedah who came to my house to seek protection from the commu-



**Marking a victory:** Tunku giving a speech before a crowd to welcome home the Merdeka delegation from London at Padang Merdeka in Malacca on Feb 20, 1956.

nists later joined Force 136.

Later, I went to Kuala Nerang to meet the commander and men of Force 136. They informed me they did not have enough men.

Colonel Hassler, the commandant, asked me to send him good, intelligent and brave young men.

I told him that as an immediate step to prevent bloodshed in Alor Star, he should advise or direct the Japanese garrison to prevent the MCP from entering Alor Star.

That evening he sent his colleague, Major Burr, and one of my men, Syed Mansor, to meet the Japanese garrison commander. After that, the Japanese garrison took control of the town.

I sent four lorry loads of young men to Kuala Nerang. They were trained and quickly showed their skills, gaining the confidence of the commander.

I was never reimbursed for the money I spent sending them there in the lorries. It came to quite a big sum. Once the commander got what he wanted, he forgot to even thank me.

Then the British Army moved in with their camp followers from India. These camp followers began chasing the women and making a nuisance of themselves, so our Force 136 men were ordered to deal with them.

The communists set up their headquarters in Jalan Raja. Nothing untoward happened, except that they wanted us to believe their boast that they would win independence for Malaya. To please the people, they offered a good exchange rate for the Japanese currency and that made them rather popular.

### Sword for a kris

After peace was officially declared, the Japanese army officers were made to surrender their swords in Sungei Patani.

I recall one incident where a vice-admiral walked towards the British military official to surrender his sword. Before he reached the official, he fainted.

The military police took him by ambulance to the Alor Star hospital. They noticed the sword lying beside him and decided to keep it

as a souvenir.

Before this squad of military police was transferred, they realised they could not take the sword with them and so they offered to exchange it for a kris. Murad, the prison official (who later became Tan Sri Murad, Commissioner of Prisons, Malaya), brought them and the sword to me and I gave them a kris in exchange.

The sword is now exhibited in the Penang Museum.

The administration was taken over by the British Military Administration (BMA). The first batch was headed by G. Sommerville, who took to bullying me by way of revenge for what had happened in 1936 when I was the District Officer in Sungei Petani.

He had been the Conservator of Forests and he prosecuted a case before me against a man accused of felling trees in the forest reserve. I considered it hardly befitting a conservator to prosecute the case himself. He should have left it to his officials.

I resented his bullying tactic and threw the case out. He never forgot this and so when he came back to Kedah as head of the BMA, he treated me rather badly. I think some of the other BMA officers have brought this to the attention of the British officers in Kuala Lumpur because not long afterwards he was replaced by E.V.G. Day, who was good compared to Sommerville.

The situation in Kedah became quite pleasant though in the early days of the British re-occupation I used to buy bread at \$5 a loaf on the black market. But since I had not eaten it for four years I thought it was worth the money. We also had to pay for cigarettes through our noses.

Not long before we were able to enjoy our new life, a fresh storm broke out to disturb the equilibrium of the Malays in Malaya. This was the proposal by Whitehall to change the constitution of the State of Malaya from a protectorate to a colony, and the Malay rulers from sovereign heads to that of grand muftis.

This plan was hatched without consulting the Malay rulers who Britain was treaty-bound to respect.

### Malay movement

It was a case of treachery against the people who had been so trusting and friendly with them. This naturally incensed the people. The rulers who should have shown some fight gave in rather meekly, so the people decided to fight the MacMichael plan on their own. Political parties were formed in all the states to fight the Malayan Union plan. Datuk Onn Jaafar was the chosen leader.

For the first time, a Malay revolutionary movement was started; first it went by the name Persatuan Melayu and later Umno (United Malay National Organisation).

Kedah held what was perhaps the biggest demonstration against MacMichael when he visited Alor Star. The kampung folk turned up in large numbers.

They flocked to the *padang* and started screaming "Down with Harold MacMichael" and "Long live the sultans".

I was the head of Serbekas but among the men who ran that political body was Senu (Datuk Abdul Rahman) and leaders who had worked with me to look after the welfare of the refugees from the Siam Death Railway.

I had only attended one general meeting of the Malay movement as representative of Serbekas in Kuala Lumpur. That meeting discussed action against the Malayan Union.

After that, I fell out with the party and decided to go to England and finish my bar exams. Soon afterwards, Datuk Senu disappeared and Serbekas existed only in name.

The Malayan Union was formed, but it did not last long in the face of strong Malay opposition under Datuk Onn's Umno.

In July 1946, the British agreed to set up a working committee composed of representatives of the six state governments, two Umno representatives and four representatives of the Malay rulers.

Malcom MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, was the chairman. They were to draft an alternative constitution to the Malayan Union.

This committee eventually agreed to a new constitution, which replaced the Malayan

Union with a new government called the Federation of Malaya, to take effect on Feb 1, 1948.

Umno under Datuk Onn had won a major constitutional victory and gained in prestige and strength to become the strongest Malay political party in the country.

In essence, the federal agreement was an Anglo-Malay compromise and the views of the Chinese and others were sought only before the agreement was finalised to become law. This government lasted until 1955.

When I took over from Datuk Onn in 1951, a newly reformed Umno with dedicated leaders (among them the late Tun Dr Ismail, Datuk Suleiman, Ghafar Baba, Khir Johari, Tan Sri Ghazali Jawi, the late Rahman Talib, Datuk Haji Hassan Junus, Kaum Ibu leader Puan Sri Fatimah Hashim and Umno Youth under Tun Sardon Jubir) decided to go all out for independence.

The call was soon taken up by the Malayan Chinese under the leadership of the late Tun Tan Cheng Lock, Col (Tun) H.S. Lee, (Tun Omar) Ong Yoke Lin, Tan Sri T.H. Tan (Tahir) and Tan Sri S.M. Yong. Later, Tun Tan Siew Sin joined in.

The Alliance of Umno and MCA was formed and the constitutional battle for independence started. Tun Abdul Razak was unable to take an active part, being a State Secretary and Acting Menteri Besar of Pahang, and he could do no more than give us moral support.

After our successes in the local council and municipal elections, the Malayan Indians Association under K.L. Devasar and later under the late Tun V. Sambanthan and Tan Sri Manickavasagam joined us.

The greatest victory was the coming together of these main racial groupings for the first time in Malayan history.

The British knew their rule in Malaya must come to an end and, like good sportsmen, they took it with good grace.

"Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka" rent the air the length and breadth of Malaya and so it was that with the united and dedicated effort of all races loyal to this country, we got our independence.