

So closely linked to birth of a nation

By DEBBIE CHAN
debbie@thestar.com.my
Photos by AZHAR MAHFOF,
SAMUEL ONG and courtesy of
ROYAL SELANGOR CLUB

THE 122-year-old Royal Selangor Club, next to Dataran Merdeka, holds a special place whenever Malaysians recall the time when the country gained its independence from the British.

It was in front of this clubhouse, on the night of Aug 30, 1957, that the Malayan flag was hoisted for the first time in the country's history.

When the new nation's first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman repeatedly shouted "Merdeka" at the padang, club members also broke into cheers of happiness.

"We had the best seats in the house to watch the historic event," recalled club president Datuk Chu Ah Nge.

What is now the air-conditioned clubhouse restaurant was then an open-air veranda that overlooked what was then the Kuala Lumpur padang.

"The veranda was packed and members were cheering enthusiastically," said Chu.

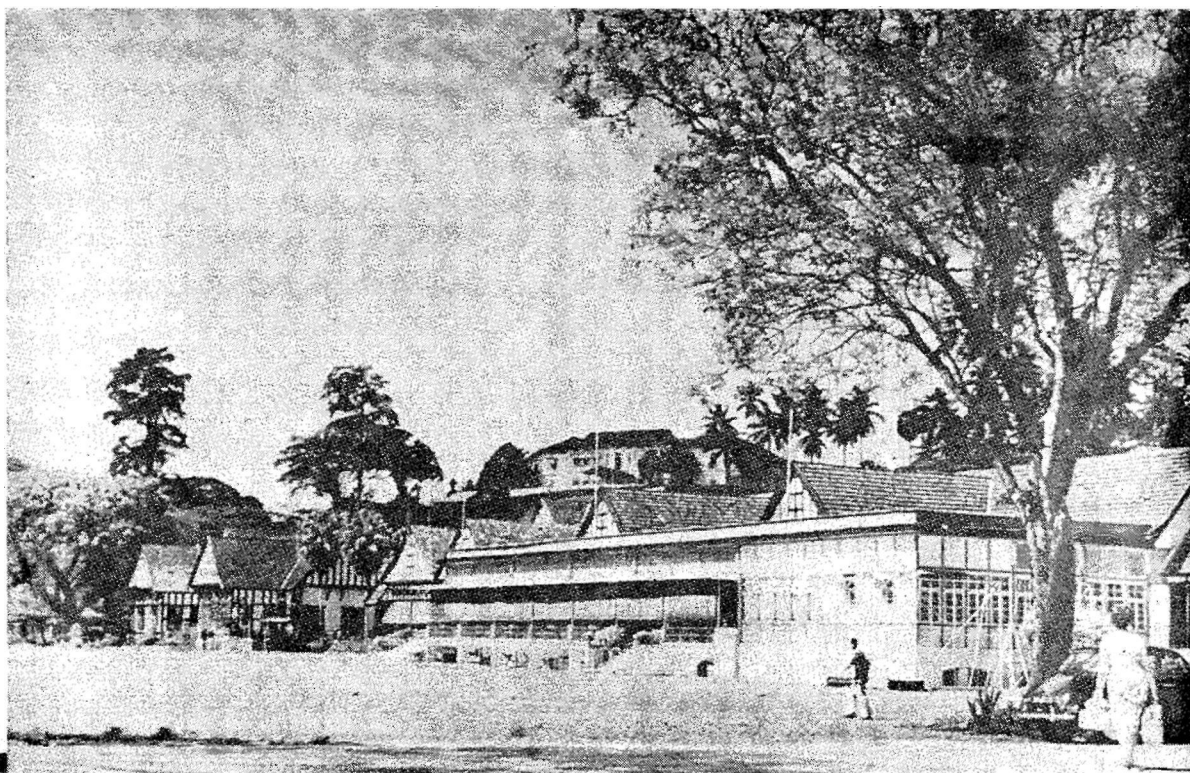
The club, which is affectionately known as The Dog, was founded in 1884 as a meeting point for educated and high-ranking members of the British colonial society.

It was awarded royal status in 1984 under the patronage of the Sultan of Selangor.

"Membership was not confined to race nor nationality but we were focused on high educational and social standards," said 80-year-old Barry Morgan, who is currently chairman of the club's food and beverage committee.

Morgan, who has lived in Malaysia since 1948, is one of the oldest members of the club.

According to Morgan, the club came to be known as The Dog because there used to be two Dalmatians guarding the entrance of the club.



A drawing of the club entitled 'The Dog in All its Glory'.



The Long Bar used to be off limits for women.



Azman ... spearheading efforts to preserve the club

"The dogs belonged to the wife of one of the club's founders and every time they visited the club, the dogs would be left at the entrance," he explained.

Over the years, the club's membership not only increased but also began to include high-ranking Malaysian civil servants.

"They include judges and lawyers



Nathan... 'hash running is an essential part of the club's identity'

and important people in society. The fact that we are located so near the High Court also made the club a meeting place for the legal fraternity," said the club's general manager SANathan.

"The club's rich history has caused it to be held dear not only by members but also by society," he said, adding that among the record feats held by The Dog was as the first club to intro-

"Hash running is an essential part of the club's identity," he said.

Not only that, members also pioneered the 19-a-side rugby game, which has grown into the strong Combined Old Boys Rugby Association (COBRA) that is now based in Jalan Utara, Petaling Jaya.

"Up till 1987, the Dataran Merdeka field belonged to the club before it was taken back by City Hall. Throughout the time when we had the field, many activities like cricket and rugby matches were held there," Chu reminisced.

People used to watch the games from the Long Bar, a portion of the club which used to be off limits to women.

"Men would drink and get very excited when they watch the games and they didn't want the ladies to see their exuberant behaviour, hence they decided to bar women visitors from the Long Bar," Chu said.

The club lost some of its old vigour and glamour with the loss of its playing field.

"We were compensated with a piece of land in Bukit Kiara which is currently the Royal Selangor Club Bukit Kiara Annexe. We are working to return the club to its former fame and glory," added Nathan.

Chairman of the club's external liaison committee Datuk Azman Ibrahim has spearheaded efforts to preserve the club.

"We are trying to get the support of various bodies to get the club recognised as a heritage building and institution," he said.

According to Azman, the club is like a second home to members and all hope that it would not be taken away from them.

"It would be sad if the building is not preserved and to see this heritage building vanish.

"This is one of the oldest clubs in the country and it derives its grandeur from history. People have to under-

twined. It is so closely linked to the nation's independence and to preserve the club is to preserve history," he explained.

In the words of the late Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah at the club's 100th anniversary celebration, "This institution should remain forever."

A 1896 picture of a police parade at the padang in front of the club.

