



# Hello, Malaysians

WE have been an independent nation for 52 years and as citizens of this nation, we are entitled to many privileges – many of which we take for granted. But there are tens of thousands of people in this country whose status remains a big question mark. It is reported that over 55,000 people are waiting for citizenship.

Due to technical matters or ignorant parents, some remain as “foreigners” in their own country. However, three women have a reason to smile as they now have legal status in the country. As the nation celebrates its 52nd independence day, **HEMANANTHANI SIVANANDAM** speaks to these newly-minted Malaysians.

## » Susanti Jong

Susanti Jong left her home in Pontianak, Indonesia to be with the man she loves. She came to Malaysia and got married to her Malaysian husband in 1998. Jong, who lives in Bentong, said she applied for permanent residency in 2004.

“I was told to wait for a few years before applying for permanent residency because that is the law in Malaysia,” Jong said.

On July 10, she became the happiest person in the world when she received a letter from the Home Ministry that said her permanent residency application had been approved.

“I quickly went to the ministry and took my oath. I’m happy that I finally received my permanent residency,” Jong said, adding her future is now more secure with her new status.

The 29-year-old mother of two daughters, aged nine and two, said she is thankful to the government for approving her application.

She said she only applied once for her PR status and

in 2006; she received a letter from the ministry stating her application was being processed and that she will be notified later.

## » Mok Moi Ching

Mok Moi Ching has a good reason to be elated. After 20 years of waiting, she finally got her citizenship but she fears her joy may be shortlived. The 52-year-old grandmother said she can’t afford to pay the RM300 administration fee when she takes her oath for her citizenship.

Those who take their oath for their permanent resident status need to pay only RM120. Mok said time is running out fast for her as she got her letter on July 29. She only has 30 days from the date of her letter to take the oath or her citizenship will be forfeited.

“I waited 20 years for this but if I don’t pay the money, I’ll remain a permanent resident and not a Malaysian,” said Mok who lives in Bentong with her husband.

Mok said she has two sons and one daughter but is

supported by her daughter.

“My sons don’t give us any money and only my daughter takes care of me and my husband but she is also married,” said the grandmother of three.

To make things worse, Mok, who used to work as an odd-job worker, cannot continue working now due to her poor health.

“I am diabetic but I also have high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, short of breath and sometimes my legs are swollen.”

She wished she received her citizenship earlier as it could have eased her burden to pay her medical bills.

“When I go to government hospitals, I end up paying double than what Malaysians are charged. This is because I don’t have my citizenship so it’s very expensive and I can’t afford it,” Mok said.

## » Chin Chien

Fifty-eight-year-old Chin Chien has a reason to smile now. Although she was born in Malaysia and has lived longer than the number of years our country has been independent, she was not lawfully a citizen.

That is because Chin received her citizenship only last month. Born in Tanjung Malim, the homemaker had only a red identity card – the symbol of her permanent resident status all these years.

When asked how she felt about getting her citizenship, Chin said she is happy that she is now lawfully a Malaysian citizen and that she can now travel overseas without complications.

Chin said it has been difficult travelling overseas with her red identity card as there were many procedures and paperwork involved.

“Before this, whenever I travel, I need to get a permit to leave the country. I also need to go to the embassy of the country I’m visiting for

the usual procedures so it’s a lot of hassle.”

The grandmother, who now lives in Cheras, said she was born to a Malaysian mother and Singaporean father but her parents did not have the necessary documents to prove they were Malaysian citizens.

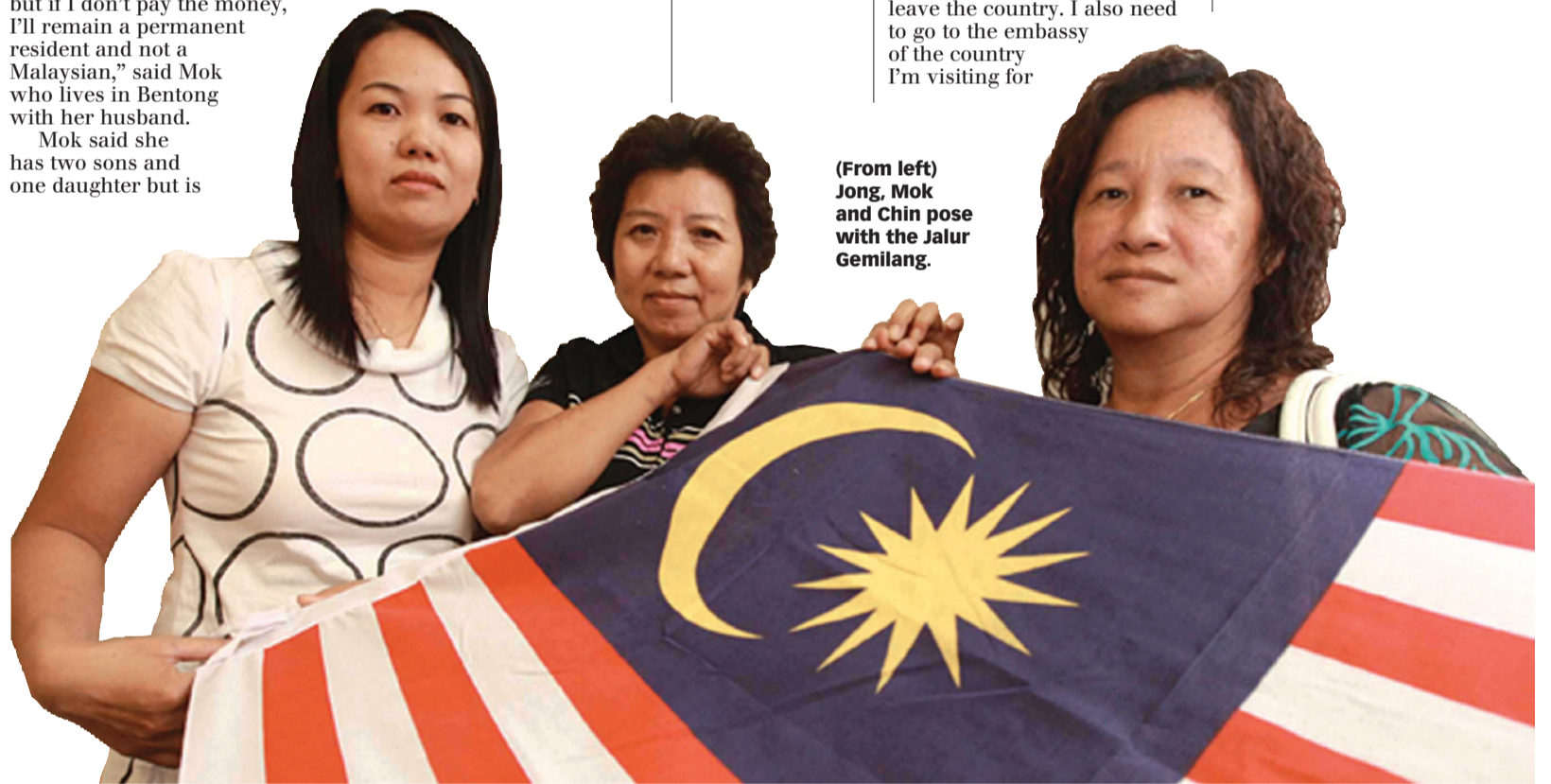
“During the Japanese occupation, my parents lost their documents, thus when I was born, I couldn’t be registered as a citizen.”

Chin said she applied for her citizenship 30 years ago at the Home Ministry but was not given any reference number for her case.

“My long wait is over and I’m thankful to the ministry for granting me citizenship. I’m also thankful my file was not misplaced during the years as it would have only made things harder,” said Chin, adding she immediately went to the ministry to take oath as a Malaysian citizen.

I waited 20 years for this but if I don’t pay the money, I’ll remain a permanent resident and not a Malaysian.”

– Mok



(From left) Jong, Mok and Chin pose with the Jalur Gemilang.

## 600 constitutional amendments in 53 years

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the three groups, which constituted themselves into a “consultative committee on constitutional proposals”, met in series of meetings and began to draft a new constitution to replace the one the Malays had objected to.

This time it was the turn of the non-Malays to protest and they formed the All-Malaya Council for Joint Action (AMCJA). They were joined by the anti-Umno Malay radical parties which formed a group called Pusat Tenaga Rakyat or Putera. AMCJA-Putera drafted a rival constitution which came to be referred to as the Peoples Constitutional Proposals for Malaya 1947 and it was approved by members in early July 1947.

Their plea to the British

government that their constitution should be accepted as it was drafted by the various communities of Malaya was rejected in favour of the British-Rulers-Umno constitution.

The Federation of Malaya came into being on Feb 1, 1948.

This development in the constitutional history of the country should be highlighted. Also should be highlighted and properly explained is the input from various representatives of the people of Malaya, especially from the Alliance, which had the largest number of elected members in the Federal Legislative Council (which became the country’s parliament after the 1959 general election), to the Reid Commission which drafted the federal constitution and which came to be known as the Merdeka Constitution.

Understanding this aspect of the country’s history would place young Malaysians in a better position to understand what is meant by “the social contract” referred to by politicians.

Perhaps it should also be pointed out to students that the present Malaysian constitution is a much-amended document and many should wonder whether the spirit of the Merdeka Constitution still resides in it after more than 600 amendments in just 53 years. The constitution of the USA is more than 200 years old and it has been amended only 27 times.

Three years after Merdeka the Constitution was amended for the first time and the Internal Security Act 1960 came into being.

Should this, too, go into the school history textbook?

