

BY **BISSME S.**

TOMORROW, we will be celebrating our 60th Independence Day. In honour of this momentous event, we asked Hassan Muthalib, the renowned film scholar and author of *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, to pick 10 local films and documentaries that showcase our Malaysian spirit.

Below are his selections and why they are a reflection of our independence:

MERDEKA MISSION► **Year:** 1956► **Director:** Unknown

Hassan says this 26-minute documentary, produced by Malayan Film (the precursor of Filem Negara), looks at how Malaysia's first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman negotiated our independence from the British.

"There are so many meanings behind the images in this documentary. The editor did a great job putting them together.

"There were many closeup shots of Tunku and these gave the impression that he was well received by the British.

"There's also an image of Tunku sitting at the same table with [the British] having dinner. That shot is enough to tell us that we are now equal to the colonials.

"When Tunku returned home from his London meeting, he received a garland from his supporters. The garland tells you that the non-Malays [also supported] him.

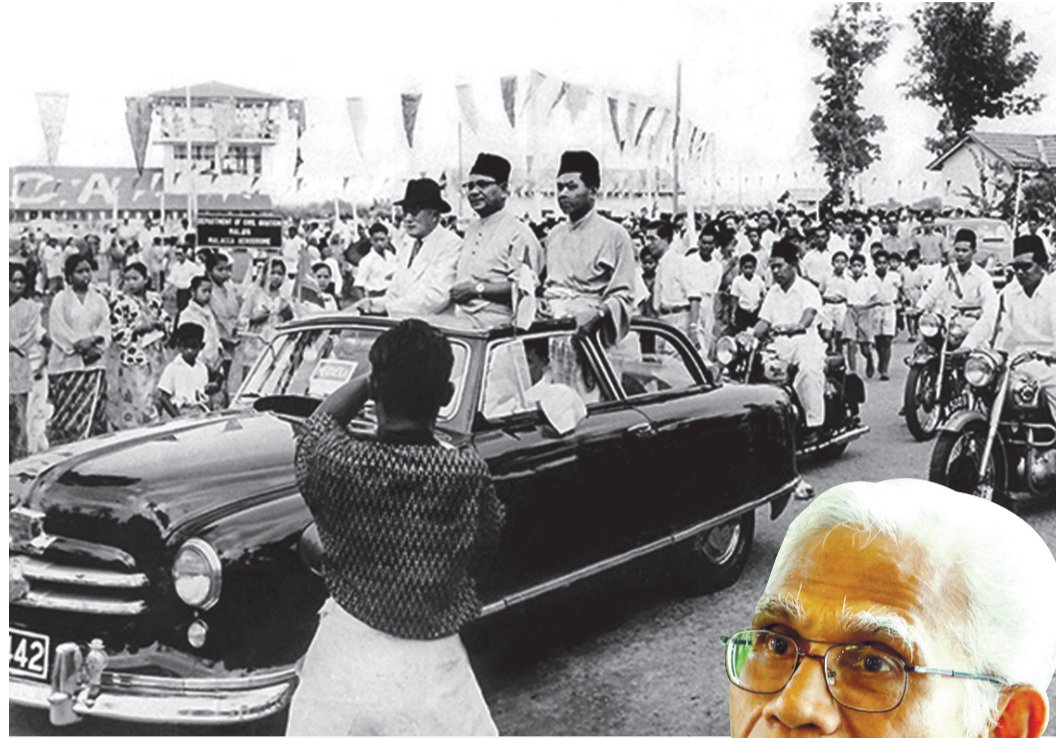
"He was driven around in an open-hood car with thousands [lining] both sides of the road to welcome him. [He received] a hero's welcome for getting our Merdeka."

PENDEKAR BUJANG LAPOK► **Year:** 1959► **Director:** P. Ramlee

Made two years after our Independence, Hassan says this Ramlee classic asked the pivotal

Capturing *the* Malaysian spirit

> In honour of our 60th Merdeka tomorrow, renowned film scholar Hassan Muthalib picks 10 films and documentaries that reflect our nation and people's aspirations



(right) Hassan ... looking at the meaning behind 10 films and documentaries made over the years that literally or realistically depict the idea of independence through the viewpoint of their respective directors, such as (clockwise, from above) Ahmad's *Road to Nationhood*; Shuhaimi's 1957: *Hati Malaya*; Ramlee's *Pendekar Bujang Lapok*; Edry's *29 Februari*; and Chiu's *Ola Bola*.



question: Are we really independent?

"At that time, a lot of Malays

could not read and write. Subtly, with a touch of humour, Ramlee shows that our colonial mentality has not disappeared, and that education is going to liberate us."

SEMAN BUKANG LAPOK► **Year:** 1961► **Director:** P. Ramlee

Hassan says Ramlee, who had never gone to film school, cleverly used film subtext to tell his stories.

"In this movie, Ramlee shows how the mentality of successful Malays has not changed even after Independence. They are so status conscious that they look down on the working class Malays.

"Also, women are bold in his films. You see Saloma's character in this film giving her lover money, and you have Normadiah's character daringly expressing her love for a man."

SEMAN► **Year:** 1987► **Director:** Mansor Puteh

Hassan says this is a modernist feature that tells the story of a young man who wants to write better scripts and create better movies.

"But his films are not accepted, so he gives up. This, to me, is an expression of how director Mansor feels that trying to be a better filmmaker in Malaysia is an uphill task that gets you nowhere."

LELAKI KOMUNIS TERAKHIR► **Year:** 2006► **Director:** Amir Muhammad

This documentary was earlier cleared for screening but

eventually was banned after questions were raised why the communists should be highlighted in a film.

Hassan explains that the communists were the first to fight for independence as they wanted the British out of the country and to stop exploiting our economy.

"Amir focuses on Chin Peng, the leader of the Malayan Communist Party. He traced the place where Chin Peng was born to the last place he [went] into hiding.

Hassan says Amir told the story through interviews he had with the people at these places who knew about Chin Peng, the communists, and their daily life.

"Indirectly, one gets the impression that the people, especially the youngsters, have forgotten about the communists."

1957: HATI MALAYA► **Year:** 2007► **Director:** Shuhaimi Baba

This film, says Hassan, is told from the perspective of a group of young people who want to produce a book on the country's independence.

"Today, some people say that we were never colonised in the first place but if we were never colonised, where does the word 'Merdeka' come from?"

BUDAK KELANTAN► **Year:** 2008► **Director:** Wan Azli Wan Yusof

Hassan says in this film, the director questions how Malay youths have lost their way.

It looks at two youths from Kelantan who come to Kuala Lumpur and end up involved in gangsterism. They kidnap women

and sell them into prostitution.

"The film was shot with a hand-held camera. The shaky scenes show the world is full of tension."

29 FEBRUARI► **Year:** 2012► **Director:** Edry Abdul Halim

Hassan says this fantasy story, about a man who only grows old every four years, allows us to see the history of our country through the character's eyes.

"The visual effects are fantastic. Archive images from the past are well used in the film."

ROAD TO NATIONHOOD► **Year:** 2016► **Director:** Ahmad Yazid

This documentary film traces Malaysia's formation, using archive footage that has never been broadcast on television, says Hassan.

"It uses cutting-edge visual effects to highlight events leading up to Merdeka and eventually, to the birth of Malaysia."

OLA BOLA► **Year:** 2016► **Director:** Chiu Keng Guan

Based loosely on the true efforts of the Malaysian national football team which successfully qualified for the 1980 Summer Olympics, this movie highlights the rekindling of the Malaysian spirit.

Hassan says: "The director shows a TV journalist who wants to leave the country, but in the end, she did not go.

"The film also shows how a sporting event can make us forget our differences and come together as Malaysians."

**Mr Big set to rock Malaysia**

MR BIG (above) will be rocking the Mega Star Arena in Kuala Lumpur on Oct 14 at 8pm.

Organised by Plan 7 Production, the Mr Big Live in Malaysia 2017 concert is part of this American hard rock band's world tour to promote its latest album, *Defying Gravity*, which was recorded in only six days.

Formed in 1988, the current and original Mr Big line-up comprises frontman Eric Martin, Billy Sheehan on the bass, Paul Gilbert on guitars, and drummer Pat Torpey.

Mr Big is best known for its classic chart-topper, *To Be with You*, that led to major international success and multi-platinum record sales.

By combining its trademark

'shredding' musicianship with awesome vocal harmonies, the band has produced a number of hit songs – be it ballads, heavy metal, or blues rock, such as *Alive and Kicking*, and *Just Take My Heart*.

Throughout the decades of changing music trends, Mr Big has remained active and popular.

The band went through a breakup in 2002, but after overwhelming requests from fans, got back together in 2009 and has continued rocking the music scene ever since.

To date, Mr Big has released a total of nine studio albums.

For more, visit the Plan 7 Production and TicketCharge websites.