

Memoirs: From Armed Struggle to Peace

(2004)

by Rashid Maidin



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Abbreviations

AMCJA	All-Malaya Council of Joint Action
API	Angkatan Pemuda Insaf, Awakened Youth Movement
AWAS	Angkatan Wanita Sedar, Movement of Aware Women
BTM	Barisan Tani Malaya, Malayan Farmers' Alliance
CPM	Communist Party of Malaya, Parti Komunis Malaya
KMM	Kesatuan Melayu Muda, Malay Youth Union
MCP	Malayan Communist Party, see CPM
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army/ TAJRM, Tentera Anti-Jepun Rakyat Malaya
MNLA	Malayan National Liberation Army/ TPNM, Tentera Pembebasan Nasional Malaya Also known as Malayan People's Liberation Army, MPLA.
PETA	Pembela Tanah Air, Defenders of the Fatherland
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party
PKMM	Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, Malayan Malay Nationalist Party
PMFTU	Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions
PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat
TPNM	Tentera Pembebasan Nasional Malaya (MPLA)
UMNO	United Malays National Organization

Preface

I would like to say a few words about why I have written this memoir. An old man like myself, born in 1917 and aged 86 today, is sure to have many memories and experienced a great deal. Yet my energy and memory are no longer strong. Since the 1930s, I was involved in the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) in the struggle against the British colonizers to free our homeland. Many have asked me why I chose to take this path and not another; they have also asked me about my experiences, my joys and pain, and my memories. I've had all kinds of questions thrown at me. It is also true that I myself have wished to write down some episodes from my struggle within the CPM.

I endured the extreme bitterness of living under both the British and Japanese. I fought against the Japanese during their occupation (1941–45) with all my might, just as I did when the British returned to rule Malaya in 1945. Between 1945–48, when I agitated peacefully against the British, I was one of CPM's public representatives, openly organizing the masses for independence. Soon after the declaration of the Emergency, I was arrested and imprisoned in British detention camps until 1952. It was a good thing that I managed to escape and join the 10th Regiment (of the Malayan National Liberation Army) with my close friend, Abdullah C. D. In December 1955, I participated in the Baling talks with Chin Peng and Chen Tien. In 1989, I was one of CPM's representatives in the Phuket negotiations which resulted in the Haadyai Peace Accord of 2 December that same year.

It is not surprising, then, that the public came to know me because my face was in the newspapers. Since the Accord, I've been able to speak openly. I have also often been approached by journalists, historians, students, and members of the public who want to know 'my story'.

As a way of respecting their wishes, I thought it best that I write down what I can remember, hence this memoir. Although it is not really complete, I hope that this book provides some answers to the many questions which I've been asked.

As I relate in these memoirs, since the peace, I've lived in Ban Chulabhorn Peace Village 11, in Yaha, Yala Province, southern Thailand. I also explain here why I haven't returned to Malaysia, the beloved homeland I struggled for. Although I live in Thailand, I follow developments in Malaysia closely. I've also had the chance to visit relatives, friends, and various prominent political figures. By the grace of God, my wife and I have also undertaken the pilgrimage to the holy land of Mecca—I am grateful and happy to have had that chance.

I hope this memoir will give some idea of the struggle which I plunged myself into for decades. I believe it will be useful in providing a more complete picture of the history of our homeland. Finally, I offer my sincere thanks to my publisher and all those who have endeavoured to help me get this book published—I deeply appreciate all your services on my behalf.

Rashid Maidin

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1

Kampung Gunung Mesah, 1917

October 1917 is a famous date in world history because of the Soviet Revolution in Russia, also known as the October Revolution. That was the month I was born, but I do not know the day, date or time; there was no Registration Department then, and you did not need to register your newborn child to get a birth certificate. And I never had the chance to ask the older folk in my village if they knew anything about my birth.

My father's name was Maidin but I don't know my grandfather's name. Both my parents were Rawa (Rao) migrants from Sumatra in Indonesia. Life in Indonesia under Dutch colonial rule was extremely harsh. Conscripted labourers were made to work arbitrarily: building roads, collecting rocks, smashing rocks—they were forced to do all this and not paid a salary. They even had to provide for their own food and drink. Thus, many migrated to the Malay Peninsula, and especially to Klang, because it was reputedly easy to get a paid job there. Among other things, it was easy to get paid work building roads, in a tin mine, or a rubber estate.

My parents were part of this wave of immigrants from Indonesia. Although they probably landed in Klang, they didn't stay there but moved up to Gopeng in Perak, where there were both tin mines and rubber estates. Although my parents were

both Rawa from Sumatra, they only met and married here in the peninsula, in Gunung Mesah, Gopeng, where I was born.

My mother, Suri binti Nandik, was divorced by my father while she was still pregnant with me, so I was raised by my mother and my grandmother. My mother had to work in the tin mines to support us. Although I was the only child my parents had together, both my parents remarried. I have several siblings from my mother's second marriage. My father also remarried. I have five siblings from my father's second marriage, four brothers and one sister. One of my brothers is Yusof Maidin, who was at one time a member of the Perak State Legislature.

I was part of the poorer and less privileged section of the village, Gunung Mesah, where I was born and raised. In 1924, I started at the Gunung Panjang Malay School, Gopeng. In the morning, I studied at the Malay school, while in the afternoons I studied at the *madrasah*. I learnt to read the Koran and when I completed it, my family held a small feast to celebrate.

I only studied for five years, that is until Standard Five, after which I was forced to stop my schooling. I had to drop out of school simply because we were too poor. My family could not afford to keep me on at school, and they needed my contribution to providing for our day to day living. I took on odd jobs such as cutting *lalang* for attap roofs, making attap roofs, collecting and carrying latex, and suchlike, often working alongside the other villagers, and earning five cents a day.

Not long after leaving school, I moved away from the village on my own. My mother had a younger sister living at the 14th mile, on the Cameron Highlands Road, in Tapah. My aunt had married someone who was considered wealthy in those days, and

they had a small sundry goods store. At 12 years of age, I was minding the store for my aunt and uncle. I could write, add, and weigh the goods. I worked there for more than a year, but was never paid. They just fed me and gave me a place to stay. Only during Hari Raya did they give me a little bit of festival money (*duit raya*).

Then came the early 1930s, when the capitalist world underwent an economic crisis. Malaya, as a British colony, was exposed to the global economy and hence also experienced the same economic decline. The two mainstays of the Malayan economy at the time, the rubber and tin industries, plunged downwards. Many mines had to cease operating, while rubber was no longer profitable, selling at only two cents a kati (about 1.3 lbs).

Many Malays from Gopeng, Tapah and Kampar—all tin mining and rubber estate areas—came up to the Cameron Highlands in search of work in the tea plantations there. I followed suit; it was unbearable to keep working for my relatives who never paid me any wages. I teamed up with a friend to run away to 30th mile, Cameron Highlands Road, to where there were tea plantations. We walked all the way, leaving early in the morning and arriving at midday.

We were lucky to get work at the Boh Tea Estate, which was owned and financed by the British. Our job was to weed out the grass around the tea bushes for 30 cents a day. Our co-workers were of all races, mainly Indians and Malays. Working conditions were terrible, it was chilly and rainy every day, and we were not given suitable clothing or footwear for the cold and damp conditions. We were forced to work. Some of us fell ill and

became feverish, but the European manager of the estate was a harsh man. He would come to the workers' quarters himself to make sure that everyone went out to work.

I could only stand this for a month. My hands were swollen and sore, my skin slashed by pulling out grass. There was no point in dreaming about having gloves! Every morning, the white overseer would swear at me, saying things like "Damn fool!". We were forced to work even when we were totally exhausted.

I had to look for another job. With a few friends, I took off for a place further up in the Highlands, at the 40th mile. There I got a job as a coolie with the land surveyors for 50 cents a day. This was a bit easier. But, after less than three months there, my uncle contacted me, urging me to come back and look after their sundry shop. It was hard to refuse, since he was my married to my aunt, my mother's younger sister. I returned to work in the shop and this time received a monthly wage.

My desire to keep studying and increase my knowledge had not been extinguished during this period. I studied English for a year with a Christian missionary who was spreading Christianity amongst the Orang Asli in the area, after which he introduced me to a Jakarta-based correspondence course, which I took for another year.

2

From Apprentice to Electrical Charginan

In 1933, at the age of 16, my uncle allowed me to look for part-time work elsewhere in addition to working for him at the store. I went to a nearby French-owned electric generator plant, with a 37 kw turbine engine. The manager was a Eurasian, that is, of Asian and Christian European parents. I asked him for work: there was a vacancy and I took the job he offered me. At first I was only an apprentice. My job was to guard the engine. So I was guarding both the generator and the minding the sundry store; someone else replaced me and looked after the generator while I was at the store since we worked eight-hour shifts.

During my two years as an apprentice there, I learned quite a bit about electronics, and obtained a second-class certificate. My wage was then raised to 30 dollars a month. (This was the Straits dollar, which was used in British colonies and protectorates in Malaya until 1939.) By this time, I was 16 or 17, and already married. In those days, it was common for boys of that age to marry, and I had chosen Hamidah myself. Hamidah had never been to school, neither had her parents. She didn't go out to work, but stayed at home and looked after the children. I had my first child when I was in Tapah; Hamidah and I had four children together.

I knew that I had to work very hard to support my family, and to get better-paid work, I had to cultivate certain talents and skills. This is why I laboured hard to continue studying English, electronics and mechanics. I also requested a transfer to Kampar, to the Talam Mines Company, which was also owned by a French company. Although my starting salary was rather low, at 25 dollars a month, it was raised to 30 dollars six months later. With this money, I helped to support my family and paid for my younger brother Yusof's studies at a vocational school.

During the day in Kampar, I looked after the engine. In the evenings, I went to night classes to study English. I did this for half a year, until I passed my English examination, which was held in Ipoh. In 1938 I also sat for the electrical charginan test and passed with first class marks.

To get higher wages, I moved to a British-financed tin mining company, the Kinta Consolidated Company Limited, which operated in Tanjung Tualang near Kampar town. My employers recognized my certificates and skills—I was fluent in English, and was a Class I electrical charginan. My wages were doubled to 60 dollars a month, which was high in those days. Ordinary labourers earned only 70 cents a day, or more or less 18 dollars a month, which was less than half of what I earned.

This time my job involved looking after the tin dredge engine. The workers there were multiracial and there was a workers' association. Unions were not new to me. In 1937, I had been a member of the Perak State Malay Drivers Association, led by Datuk Panglima Bukit Gantang and Datuk Haji Abdul Wahab. The qualifications for membership were easy—you just had to have a driving licence. The association's aims were also simple:

if any member had an accident involving the car he was driving, the association would defend him.

The Perak State Malay Drivers Association was a welfare, not a political, organization. However, it contained the seeds of political awareness, since it meant that Malays were looking after their own welfare while struggling with their collective fate.

3

Lai Raifel and My Political Awakening

In 1941, a young Chinese man started working at the mine. He was fluent in three languages—Chinese, Malay and English. He was, from the way he spoke and behaved, an educated man. Why, I wondered, was he working as a coolie for seventy cents a day? He was good at mixing with everyone, and not long after he arrived, we became close friends. Once, I asked him why he came to work there for such low wages. He answered, “Just to earn a living”.

When we had worked together at the mine for a while and had become closer, he introduced me to the labour union and asked me to join them. There were a few other Malays working there. If I'm not mistaken, the union was called the Kinta Mining Workers' Association. It turned out that the young man was a CPM cadre who had been sent to arouse the spirit of independence amongst the mine workers. He was known as Lai Raifel.

Raifel was a warm and humble person, and I always found time to chat with him. During our conversations, he never tired of explaining his ideas to me. He said that the riches of Malaya and that of the Malays were native to this land. Yet, sadly, the wealth of the land was not owned by its native people but instead scooped up by English capitalists and sent back to their country.

“See, you yourself are a Malay employed by the whites in your own home”.

Although brief, his reasoning was a lesson which illuminated something which I had not fully grasped before. It really transformed my view of the world. He explained that the Malays were a brave people, and that Perak was where Datuk Maharajalela had fought against the colonizers, but because the colonial army was superior, he was defeated in the end. Pointing at the mine itself, he told me how greedily the colonizers had pillaged our homeland of its riches, while our people suffered and remained impoverished, waiting hand and foot on the English capitalists.

Raifel gave me a book written by an Italian called *The Japanese Aggression*, containing news and photographs about the cruelty of the Japanese fascists. He told me that they had taken control of China and that soon they would invade Southeast Asia, including Malaya. He also said that, while the Japanese were ferocious, they wouldn't be able to withstand a prolonged defence by people willing to fight to the death.

Lai Raifel

Lai Raifel's real name was Toh Lung San, and he was born in 1922 in Sitiawan, Perak. He was educated at Nan Hwa High School, the same school attended by Chin Peng and Eng Ming Ching (Suriani Abdullah). When World War II began, he was actively involved in the anti-Japanese movement supporting China.

In 1941, he was sent by the CPM to organize the tin mine workers in Tanjung Tualang, Perak—this was when we met and

when I became politically awakened. When the union movement grew, Raifel and other comrades were arrested by the British and sent to jail. In jail, he displayed his courage, not bowing down to the enemy in the slightest. He was released at the outbreak of the Pacific War, that is, when the Japanese fascists entered Malaya, under a pact between the British and CPM to jointly fight back against the Japanese. He was released from jail to attend the 101 Special Training School in Singapore, which was set up by the British in cooperation with the CPM to train anti-Japanese resistance fighters.

At first, he led the 2nd Regiment of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) operating in Negeri Sembilan, but in July 1942, he was sent to Perak as the head of MPAJA's 5th Regiment. He was one of the key leaders who attended an important conference of the CPM's Central Committee on 1 September 1942, during which, through the treachery of the double agent Lai Tek, the Japanese staged an ambush. Raifel and half of the other leaders displayed their revolutionary heroism fighting a bloody battle to try to get through three Japanese blockades. When he reached a river, Raifel rescued a fellow comrade and fighter, Chang Ling Yun, who was hurt. Chang (Ah Soo), a member of the CPM Politburo, managed to escape.

In mid-1943, Raifel was surrounded by a Japanese troop and fell into the hands of the fascists. In prison, he again displayed an unshakeable determination to resist the enemy. The Japanese used a hundred different ways, harsh and soft, to force him to give in, but to no avail. In the end, they sentenced him to death by beheading.

On the day of his beheading, the Japanese deployed 300 to 400 soldiers and policemen to guard the execution site; they also

imposed a curfew along all the roads en route to the execution grounds. Facing the executioner's sword, Raifel did not flinch. In his final moments, he fearlessly shouted the sacred slogans: "Bring Down Fascist Japan", "Long Live the CPM!" Even the ferocious Japanese soldiers were astonished when they witnessed Raifel's courage, and some were moved to tears.

Lai Raifel was the finest prince of Malaya, sacrificing his youth, and his life, to the anti-Japanese struggle, he struggled hard to free us. When he died, he was just 21 years old.

4

Anti-Colonialism on the Rise

Raifel had truly been my political teacher, opening up my mind to new ideas. I began to think long and hard about all the issues confronting our nation. I recalled the deeds of Datuk Maharajela and Datuk Sagor, who had been branded as traitors. As a child of Perak, my anti-British spirit had been there all along, albeit buried deeply, because of Maharajalela's war. Stories about this war had seeped into me and influenced me since I was little. I had also read some books about it since leaving school. Yet, only a few who knew, and were brave enough to say so, would openly claim that these men could be considered to have been defenders of our nation and homeland. Thinking thus, the seeds of nationalism and patriotism began to mature within me.

It was from that moment of political awakening that I began to feel loathing towards the British managers of the mine. I stopped greeting them with "Sir" or "Good Morning" or showing other signs of respect when I met them. I remember one incident in particular. I chanced upon a British officer in the midst of unleashing his fury on two of the miners. Because I was so angry with him, and my anger towards the colonizers flared up, I flung my bicycle into the mine pit. The officer reacted by wanting to take action against all three of us, but when we showed him that

we were ready to confront him with hammers and steel rods, he backed down, knowing what would happen to him if he didn't.

Before Lai Raifel left us to organize workers elsewhere, he advised us to remain determined to develop the labour union which he had set up. Our workplace association grew rapidly. Some other Malay friends and I were given the task of organizing the Malay mine workers and also setting up other branches. The movement spread widely, from Malim Nawar to Tanjung Tualang. There were at least ten tin dredges in the area and we set up a branch of our association at each mine, each led by one of our group. This was when I was accepted as a member of the Communist Party of Malaya, becoming the first Malay to join the party.

We tried to register our association at the registry office to facilitate management. Our request was accepted by the authorities at the time. Our association had a multiracial membership of Indians, Chinese and Malays. I had the chance then to lead the Kinta Mining Workers Association for a year or two. Other than tackling issues such as working conditions at the mine, especially to do with pay, I also spread political information to our members, on topics such as the British colonization of our homeland, and Japan's race to replace the British in Malaya. So, we predicted the arrival of the Japanese, and when it actually happened, our political credibility grew accordingly.

The Kinta Mining Workers Association (Kesatuan Saling Membantu Bijih Timah Daerah Perak) was one of the largest unions in Malaya, with around 20,000 members. It held an important place in the labour movement because the tin industry in the Kinta Valley was the most economically valuable centre for the British.

It should be noted that even before World War II began and before the Japanese invaded Malaya in 1941, an anti-colonial movement existed in Malaya, that is the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), pioneered by Ibrahim Yaacob, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam. However, KMM had not been active in my area. I did not even know where to look for them, so I was not involved with them. Moreover, I did not mix with Malay intellectuals, who largely dwelt in the towns, while I was a local labour activist in the Batu Gajah area.

5

The Japanese Occupation

Turmoil arrived only too soon. In December 1941, the Japanese fascists began to land on Kelantan's beaches. The registration of the worker's association was put on hold, while Lai Raifel and a few other top CPM cadres went into hiding. My contact with the party was broken.

The chief engineer at the mine set up a local defence corps. I was recruited as a member, and given a uniform and a weapon. When the Japanese bombed and sank the British warship, *Prince of Wales*, the chief engineer told us that whoever wished to follow the British to Singapore could do so, while those who wanted to return home could also do so. We chose to return home. The mine was closed. We were given three or four months' bonus, and a promise that we would have our jobs again some day.

Three months into their occupation, the Japanese reopened the mine and I returned to work there again. Since there was a shortage of skilled and reliable men amongst the mine workers, and the Japanese too were short of skilled men, I was chosen as the shift foreman. Each shift was made up of around 70 men. The foreman was the head labourer and was given the power to dismiss workers.

The Japanese were even more greedy in robbing our nation of its wealth. They needed as much tin as they could get and the

mine ran on three shifts. But our wages were extremely low; I arranged for some of the tin ore to be hidden and sold on the black market so that the workers could earn a bit more money.

One day, while having a drink at a coffee shop, a few young Chinese men approached me. One of them said, “Your old friend asked us to get in touch with you”. I was dumbfounded. I replied, “Who?” They didn’t say who it was but continued, “...someone who used to work here, a close friend who gave you a book on the cruelty of the Japanese”. I understood, upon hearing this, that it was Raifel who had sent them.

I asked the Chinese youths to take me to meet him, but they replied that this was not possible since he was in the MPAJA. “He wants to know how you are”, one of them said. I replied simply, “(Tell him) I haven’t changed”.

6

Back in the CPM

I was thus reconnected with Raifel and the CPM after Raifel's messengers spoke to me at the coffee shop. Our secret communications and letters were sent via messengers. The party used this route to send me CPM newspapers, magazines and other printed material.

Raifel asked me to continue organizing the multiracial mine workers in the Kinta Valley. He also encouraged me to expose the tyranny of the Japanese Occupation, arouse people to oppose the Japanese, and cooperate with and assist the MPAJA troops in the jungle.

I began to spread propaganda and conduct campaigns covertly so as not to draw the attention of the fascist Japanese military authorities. One theme of my talks for the workers was Raifel's prediction that the Japanese and their cronies would not last long. I also disseminated the contents of the party's newspapers to the workers.

The workers had a burning desire to support the armed anti-Japanese struggle, but they had to keep their feelings hidden and support the movement secretly, or they would be beheaded.

Not long after, the Japanese surrendered to the Allied forces. Most unfortunately, the vile, egotistical Lai Tek, who was CPM's Secretary-General at the time and a double agent (as we discovered

later) did not proclaim independence then, as Soekarno had in Indonesia. Even Ibrahim Yaacob himself, as KMM's leader before the war and the head of Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung (KRIS, also known as Kesatuan Rakyat Istimewa) during the Japanese Occupation, had discussed with Lai Tek a plan to jointly proclaim independence, and unite to resist the re-entry of the British. Each had their own store of weapons, Ibrahim Yaacob's men had arms left behind by the Japanese Army, while CPM had arms provided by the British themselves—but Lai Tek had rejected Ibrahim's proposal. Ibrahim himself was subsequently hunted by the British and forced to flee to Indonesia. Lai Tek, the enemy agent, was successfully uncovered by Chin Peng in 1947; he then fled to Bangkok, where he met his retribution.

Meanwhile, in a short period, two weeks after the Japanese surrender, the MPAJA had advanced and taken control of towns and cities throughout much of Malaya. It was at one large-scale celebration in Tanjung Tualang to welcome the MPAJA troops that I met up again with one of my old comrades. His name was Weng Chung and he led one of the MPAJA companies. Weng Chung proposed that I take up full-time party work in the CPM Propaganda Division headquartered in Ipoh.

The Propaganda Division had between 50 to 60 members led by Eng Ming Ching, a CPM female cadre. Her husband Lai Raifel was a patriotic martyr during the Japanese Occupation. It was here too that I first met Abdullah C. D. (I called him Dat then). We later fought alongside each other to liberate our homeland. Although Abdullah C. D. was six years younger than me, he was regarded as my senior because he had undergone a bloody initiation with the MPAJA guerrillas in their anti-Japanese fascist war. In 1955,

during the anti-British struggle, Abdullah C. D. married Eng Ming Ching, who took on the Muslim name of Suriani Abdullah.

Abdullah was also a member of the Propaganda Division; we all wore uniforms of black trousers and white shirts. The party arranged for transport such as buses and cars. Our unit roamed all over Perak, holding celebrations and public rallies to celebrate the winning of the anti-Japanese war. We were very warmly received by the people—each time we held a rally, tens of thousands of people from all communities and levels of society came to hear our speeches.

I remember one incident when the unit was staging an event somewhere between Ipoh and Batu Gajah. British forces were landing again in Malaya, and there were five or six British officers present at our event, trying to intimidate us. They were uttering some threats, which we pretended we couldn't hear. No one was afraid of them because we were in high spirits, and moreover, we outnumbered them. At last, fed up with their behaviour, I shouted at them, "What do you want?", after which some of the officers got up and left.

7

The Movement After the Anti-Japanese War

Just after World War II, people's lives were miserable, worsened by the fact that the Japanese currency was now worthless paper. Yet the masses were full of spirit. *Towkays* and other wealthy persons donated rice and other things. We cooked rice porridge and distributed it to whoever was hungry. In addition, we put forth some demands to the British (British Military Administration). If I'm not mistaken, among these were:

- Give ten dollars in exchange for the worthless Japanese currency
- Provide work for the unemployed promptly
- Provide medical care for the sick
- Send food to Malaya and distribute it to the people as soon as possible.

At one of our public rallies in a field in Ipoh, a high-ranking British official from Kuala Lumpur came to threaten the masses. He growled, "We have not brought you rice or food, but guns and cannons".

Other than a severe food shortage, this was a time when discord arose between the races, particularly between the Malays and Chinese, at the instigation of the Japanese fascists and British colonialists. In many places, the British had stirred up Malays

to form *parang* gangs to fight the Chinese, which the Chinese retaliated against. The result was bloodshed. Tanjung Tualang too had its *parang* gang, ready to fight. I was often involved in special meetings with the Malay community, especially Malay workers, to spread the message of peace, advising them not to create enmity and explaining the true causes of the conflict. Luckily, the determined efforts of some people meant that interethnic tensions in some places died down. But there was still bloodshed elsewhere.

In 1945, Mokhtarrudin Lasso, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy and others set up the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM, Malayan Malay National Party). This was when Abdullah C. D. and I ended our duties at the Propaganda Division and shifted our attention to the Malay movement, especially to supporting the PKMM's struggle. In Perak, we published the newspaper *Suara Rakyat* (Voice of the People) as the official mouthpiece of the PKMM. However, Mokhtarrudin Lasso absconded, and we moved to Kuala Lumpur. The paper moved with us as well.

Two houses had been prepared for us to work in, one in Kuala Lumpur known as Rumah Merdeka (Independence House) and another one in Setapak, Selangor. My wife and children stayed in Setapak. As comrades in the struggle, everyone who lived in these houses became intimate friends and we often attended functions and public rallies together. Moreover, at the time, the spirit of intermingling between the various groups was ablaze—there were roughly ten rallies each month, and everyone was invited to all the rallies. And whenever I had to go on some special mission, Abdullah C. D. would look after my wife and children. We even shared our meals of plain bread and water when we were short of money.

8

Stoking the Independence Spirit

Publishing the newspaper was a bittersweet experience. We were forced to be extremely frugal. Luckily, our writers were all fellow progressives who shared the same hopes and desires for independence. They all worked with a full awareness of the importance of the struggle without being too concerned about getting paid.

We saved money by buying large sheets of paper that we had to cut to size ourselves. Once an issue was printed, I delivered copies to the bookstores myself, and collect the takings later. Sometimes, I had to stay overnight in another town, and would save on paying for a hotel room by getting in touch with the local worker's association. All the associations knew of us, so wherever we went, we were warmly welcomed and there would be a place to stay.

Despite having to work so hard, we felt proud and happy about being able to contribute our services to the struggle because we knew that our newspaper played a vital role as CPM's official organ, setting the hearts of our readers ablaze with the spirit of independence.

After Mokhtaruddin Lasso decamped, Abdullah C. D. became involved with the PKMM and was soon selected to join its leadership. Thus, we became even busier. Although I

was not officially in the PKMM, I was invited to take part in various discussions. We poured our energies into developing the organization, especially by spreading propaganda intended to unite Malays along a progressive path, and to help coordinate between CPM and PKMM. This is how I came to know PKMM leaders like Dr Burhanuddin, Ishak Haji Muhammad and others.

Another thing we were involved in after the war was assisting the Indonesian people in their struggle against the Dutch. Both the British and the Dutch cooperated to suppress the Indonesian people. Some Dutch troops who were being sent to put down the Indonesian revolution were stationed in Malaya for a while. Amongst them were some Indonesian officers. We carried out propaganda work, raising their nationalistic spirit. Some of them were awakened and changed direction, not wanting to suppress their own people's struggle. We also set up an organization influenced by Hadi Nor to help the Indonesian Revolution. In this way, we won over the sympathies of the Malayan people in support of the Indonesian people's democratic struggle.

During this period of peace following the end of World War II, my time, energy and thoughts were absorbed in the struggle, that is, to awaken people's awareness of the need for independence. At the time, independence was something championed only by the left. UMNO and its supporters were around, led by Dato' Onn Jaafar, but they did not want independence and opposed our movement. They said of us that although we struggled, we "were incapable of even making a needle and (yet) wanted independence, of all things".

My family supported my activities. My wife Hamidah permitted me to fully engage in the struggle. Although she faced all kinds of hardship, she never complained—on the contrary,

despite her difficulties, she was a good housewife who performed all her duties well. This was also the case with the rest of my family.

9

The Commonwealth Communist Party Conference 1947

Political awareness amongst the peoples of Asia, in particular, grew rapidly after World War II. People wanted to see the end to colonial oppression, and independence for their nations as soon as possible. It was in this atmosphere that the British Empire Conference of Communist Parties was held in London in 1947. CPM sent three of us to attend the conference on behalf of the largest ethnic groups in Malaya: I was to represent the Malays, Wu Tien Wang the Chinese, and R. Balan the Indians.

When I was picked to represent CPM in London, I felt that I was not really qualified to play that role. Chin Peng asked me to meet him and said, “The party has chosen you as a representative at the London meeting, what’s your answer?” “Aahh!” I replied, “How can I do this? My knowledge is pretty shallow”. Chin Peng immediately responded, “If its shallow, that’s easy...go to London, and learn whatever you can”. So I took heart, and hoped that this journey overseas, and seeing another country, would add to my experience and knowledge.

Our delegation boarded a ship which traversed the vast Indian Ocean. That was the first time I had ever been on a ship and sailed to another country. I gazed out as far as I could see into

the horizon over the rolling waves, feeling so proud and lucky because I had been entrusted to represent the party in that white man's country. As the child of poor peasants, a labourer with a humble education, how would I have ever had such a chance if not for my involvement in our struggle? In those days, the chance to visit another country, what more England, was not something open to ordinary people—only the rich, influential, or those sent by the British could go there.

I recalled Raifel's words, "Wherever we go, we will have friends if we are in this grand struggle", the truth of which I myself was to experience. Soon I would meet comrades in the same struggle from other countries. Wow! I was excited and filled with pride.

On the ship, there were two priests returning to London from Indonesia. The Christian fathers did not know who we were, and we dined at the same table. So, although we exchanged news and asked where from, where to, and so on, we did not reveal our secret. They told us, "Indonesia is in chaos, stirred up by the communists, and our safety is not guaranteed, so we have been forced to return to London". We asked "What happened?" They replied, "Indonesians are docile and easily led. If they are given forty rupiah a month, then that's enough. If they are paid twenty or thirty rupiah a month they also accept that, no problem. But when the communists came and instigated them, then Indonesia was shaken up. We were forced to return to London". Their words angered me and I wanted to respond but had to exercise self-discipline and be quiet to keep secret the fact that we were communists. Or else we'd be quarrelling continuously and surely no good would come of that. But in my heart I thought, "The Indonesian communists are heroes to me, fighting for the freedom

of their homeland. These white folk, the Christian priests, were colonial agents. They just want to control other people's countries. That's their attitude, that's their view".

The following day, our ship arrived in India and we docked there for two days. Comrades from the Communist Party of India led by P. C. Joshi welcomed us and took us to their office. We were invited to a banana leaf rice meal. Although we had not met each other before, in the spirit of internationalism and as comrades-in-arms, we quickly became intimate friends. Later, we left for London together.

In London, we boarded a train and when the train we were on pulled into the station, a group of people wearing red flowers ran up and scrambled on board. Cheerfully, they called out, "From Malaya? From Malaya?" We shook hands and hugged each other. They were all members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) who had come to welcome us.

Representatives from various Commonwealth countries were already at the venue. We had the chance to meet and exchange experiences with people of many nations. Again, I felt proud and fortunate to be there at that moment in time. How great and noble were my comrades from all these nations! Although we had never met before, we were of one heart and soul—internationalists. And since we ignored rank and status, whether high or low, ruler or ruled, all the participants were considered equal.

It made me recall how people were in Malaya before World War II. When we met a European, we would greet them with

deference. Even our schoolteachers taught us to do this. When a white person crossed our path, we should respectfully say, "Greetings, sir". All work would stop. We considered Europeans gods from heaven, and were taught from an early age to show respect to all white persons. So when I got to London, it was still engrained in me that white people were wealthy and should be shown respect. Although I had seen how they had run away *poste-haste*, and suffered hardship as they were chased by the Japanese fascists, yet I felt that the people in England were not like this.

But, as I walked around London, people would approach me. They asked, "Do you have a card or not?" At the time, if you wanted to buy clothes, you had to have ration card; if you wanted to food, you had to have a card—you needed a ration card for everything. They would say that they had extra cards and wanted to sell me one. There were many poor, destitute and homeless whites roaming the streets of London, holding up all kinds of signs asking for work. There were even beggars. All were European—if their status was so high, then how was it that their lives were so pathetic? I displayed my resentment towards them, but later, I felt that behaving like this was not good. I even had my shoes shined while I was wearing them—they were polished and cleaned with no embarrassment or shyness by a white person! This was a mental revolution for me.

I return now to the British Empire Conference of Communist Parties, hosted by the CPGGB. It lasted about a week; among the participants were representatives from: Malaya, Burma, Ceylon, India, Australia, Canada and the Middle East. Each delegation was asked to give a report about the situation *vis-à-vis* independence in their country.

We presented our report, which included details of the CPM-led anti-Japanese struggle and the spirit of the people in resisting the Japanese fascists, in connection with the political awakening of the Malayan people after World War II and the independence movement. Our delegation was highly esteemed as representatives of warriors who had fought to the death to resist the Japanese Occupation. We received thunderous applause. Many of our comrades were awed by the three years of armed struggle of the Malayan people against the Japanese. It was a mystery, they said, and they wanted to know how CPM had organized troops that could move swiftly through the jungles, and how we had planned our attacks, and so on.

At the end of the conference, a declaration was issued to demand independence for all the countries colonized by the British. The declaration was intended to force the British government to release its iron claws on the countries they were trespassing on, and simultaneously give encouragement to all independence movements around the world.

Although it was our first meeting, our comradeship left a deep impression on me. Subsequently, we continued to exchange greetings via telegrams or letters while we were engaged in our respective struggles.

While we were in London, an Englishwoman suddenly came looking for us. She said she was a messenger from Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was studying for his law degree in London. We asked her where the Tunku was and she replied that he was too

busy, but he had sent along a letter to our delegation. Among other things, the Tunku asked our forgiveness for not being able to attend the conference as an observer. He also said that he hoped the conference would be a success.

An ex-British Resident of Selangor also sent a messenger with a letter inviting me to make time to meet him to exchange views about political developments in Malaya. In my opinion, it seemed that the British colonial government wanted to have a first-hand account of the spread of communism among the Malays because this was a major threat to their rule in Malaya. I neither replied to his letter, nor met him.

Around the same time, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, Abdullah C. D. and others also left to attend the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, which was held to discuss the problems of the independence movements of Asia.

When we had all returned home, I, on behalf of the CPM, and Dr Burhanuddin on behalf of the PKMM, travelled throughout Malaya to convey the spirit of both conferences to the masses to stir up their pro-independence feelings. Wherever we went, we were most warmly welcomed. We went to Malacca first. Our welcome was extraordinary—the field where we held the public rally was overflowing with people. Dr Burhanuddin, myself and others gave speeches. It was the same in Kedah. The Kedah representative held a feast at Seberkas Restaurant to celebrate our arrival. Among those present were: Khir Johari, Senu Abdul Rahman, Zahari Taib and others. In Selangor we were fêted by Melan Abdullah, Mustapha Hussein and others. In Kelantan, we were greeted by Saad Shukri Hj Muda. We also held public rallies in Kota Bahru, Pasir Putih and elsewhere. In Terengganu, we were welcomed by Cik Muda from Besut and Ibrahim Fikri from

Kuala Terengganu. In Perak, we were welcomed by Ustaz Abu Bakar, a reknown religious expert and headmaster of Maahad Al-Ehya Assyarif School in Gunung Semanggul.

In my travels, I felt encouraged by the people's welcome. Even the sultans attended our public rallies and talks. The spirit of independence was truly ablaze in the hearts of the masses.

10

Struggling for Independence

The determined efforts of the CPM, PKMM and various other organizations such as the labour unions and citizen's associations, as well as progressives of all races, spread the hope of independence, which was hugely welcomed by people from all layers of society. Shouts of *Merdeka!* echoed everywhere. Amongst the Malays, the loudest cries for independence came from the PKMM and its constituent groups such as the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API, Awakened Youth Movement), which was banned by the British and later replaced by Pembela Tanah Air (PETA, Defenders of the Fatherland), Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS, Movement of Aware Women), Barisan Tani Malaya (BTM, Malayan Farmers Alliance), and Hizbul Muslimin, all of whom cooperated to uphold and further the struggle to free our homeland.

To distract and deceive the public, the British hatched a plan they called the Malayan Union, comprising the Federated and Unfederated Malay States. In the Federated and Unfederated States, the sultans had been annointed as upholders of Islam and Malay customary law and were given some status as heads of state in the pre-war British administration. Now all were to be included under the Malayan Union scheme. By dishonourable means, the sultans and chiefs were forced to sign the agreement

putting it into place. The Malays felt threatened by the Malayan Union and began to oppose it. UMNO was set up by Dato' Onn bin Jaafar in 1946 during this period—this was why UMNO's slogan at the time was “Long Live the Malays”, while those of us from CPM and PKMM called out “independence” and were branded as leftists and extremists. The non-Malays, especially the Chinese, opposed the Malayan Union because it separated Singapore from Malaya.

Because the people's aspirations for independence were shoved aside by the colonialists, the political strength of the Malay left joined forces to set up PUTERA, while the non-Malay political groups came together under the umbrella of the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA). The people's strength assumed massive proportions when the Malay and non-Malay left joined forces to become PUTERA-AMCJA, which launched a week-long strike throughout the nation. During this week, workers went on strike, shopkeepers closed their doors, and the entire British administration was under threat. The whole country fell silent, as though it had been attacked by a mythical giant garuda. Everyone obeyed party instructions, which made our work easier. Everyone we met showed us respect and we in turn conveyed news of the strike and the hopes of the people—including labourers, farmers, rickshaw pullers, shopkeepers—for independence.

Abdullah C. D. and I continued to try to develop the Malay left in PKMM as well as carry out our duties at the CPM Department of Malay Work, which concentrated on issues of unity and organized various levels of Malay society under the same hopes for independence. The British administration now bared its fangs and began to suppress our activities as well as

those of other leftist groups: public rallies or celebratory parades were forbidden, and they banned API, which was led by Ahmad Boestamam.

Our response was to set up another organization, PETA, to replace API. API's members and their hopes and spirits could not be extinguished easily. People who were politically aware and already members of various associations were unafraid to attend public rallies even though they were often forced to get past police blockades as well as face possible persecution by the authorities. Certainly, the British colonizers were feeling uneasy and threatened by this awakening of people's desire for independence. The British increased their pressure and intimidation—signs of force and suppression were becoming increasingly obvious.

By systematically analyzing the situation, the CPM saw clearly that a time would come when the British would launch a large-scale campaign against the forces of independence, a campaign that would be ferocious and bloody. Thus, CPM's central leadership gave orders for its cadres in various organizations to withdraw to the countryside. At the same time, in mid-June 1948, Malay cadres were instructed to attend the All-Malaya Party School Camp in the jungles of Lubuk Kawah, Temerloh, Pahang.

The training school was run by a CPM Central Committee leader known as Haji Hashim (Chen Nan). Malay cadres from all the states in Malaya came to the school, including Abdullah C. D. and myself. The school prepared Malay CPM cadres to set up guerrilla teams in all corners of the peninsula in order to rid Malaya of the British. We received political and military training for two weeks. After this I was assigned the job of forming an armed Malay unit in the Sungai Manik area, in Perak.

In keeping with the party's instructions, when I finished my training, I moved to Labu Kubung, Sungai Manik. There I found a piece of land suitable for cultivation to support my family, while I carried out party work and awaited my orders.

This was how most of the young men and women in the CPM received their training. They went back to their respective homes and villages, to keep an eye on the situation and wait and see. Politically speaking, we were rather conservative and backward and thousands of CPM members were soon caught and imprisoned by the British. Fortunately, the core of the party was not affected, and very rapidly, they reunited the armed forces within the party to set up the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA, *Tentera Pembebasan Nasional Malaya*).

11

In Detention Camp, 1948–52

That was around the end of June 1948, when the Malayan Emergency was declared. I myself could hardly have imagined how quickly and ruthlessly the British colonial government would deploy the Emergency laws. My wife, who was ill at the time, had a foreboding that something bad was going to happen to me.

The messenger I was awaiting never came; what did arrive was a police contingent headed by a Malay Special Branch Officer bearing a summons for me to be taken to the police station. Before leaving, I took leave of my wife and lined up my three children and kissed them. I promised them, “Father will return tomorrow”. I walked down the steps to the sounds of my children sobbing. My wife too was weeping under her blanket. Those were my last moments with my wife and children.

I was arrested under suspicion of being a communist. At first I was detained in the Teluk Anson (Teluk Intan) lock-up, then transferred to Taiping jail by train. I was handcuffed with a Chinese youth whom I didn’t know. I ran into Aminuddin Baki, who was returning to Chemor from his studies in Singapore. When he saw me, he was confused and alarmed, “Have you been arrested, Brother Rashid?” he said, shaking his head, but continued, “Brother, you mustn’t worry, remain strong, don’t waiver”. I replied, “I’m not wavering”.

We shook hands and parted. He gave me an English magazine that he was reading and one dollar. I refused to take it, but he said it could be useful.

Aminuddin Baki was at the time influenced by PKMM and API. Before the Emergency, he often came to the CPM office in Ipoh to meet me and Abdullah C. D. He wanted us to help him study in Indonesia. But sadly, at the time, the Indonesians were engaged in a struggle against the Dutch colonizers and he was forced to study in Singapore. He later became the chief education advisor in Malaya.

After three nights in the Taiping lock-up, I was taken to the prison. We didn't have to change our clothes. You could wear your own clothes, but the food and other things were as for prisoners: rice mixed with tapioca and sweet potato with *kangkung*, with fish once a week. And that only a small piece. For breakfast, there was rice porridge with bran and a little salt. Whether you felt like eating or not, or whether you were bored or content with the food, you had to keep chewing, as there was no other choice.

After six months in Taiping, about 50 of us, including Ustaz Abu Bakar Al-Baqir, Cikgu Sabrun, Cikgu Sarip and Osman Bakar from Perak, Cikgu Mat Din from Kedah, some from Pahang, Johor, from PKMM, PETA, BTM, Kesatuan Buruh and other organizations—Malays, Chinese, Indians—were all escorted to the Pulau Jerjak Detention Camp. In our group, there were roughly similar numbers of Malays and Chinese. Most were in their teens or early twenties. On our journey, we were shackled with long chains, each chain linking 10 to 12 persons closely guarded by Malay policemen, with a British superintendent. We walked dragging our chains via Taiping town, in full view of the public, then boarded a ferry at Butterworth for Pulau Jerjak.

The question of an investigation

The strange thing was that there had been no investigation process before the arrest. Only once, a Special Branch police officer named Yunus from Ipoh had asked—not many questions, but to verify that I was Rashid bin Maidin. Perhaps the British colonial powers were far too busy arresting people en masse to have time to process the prisoners. It was broadcast that on the first day of the Emergency, 5,000 persons were arrested and detained. That was only on one night. This was followed by endless arrests.

At Pulau Jerjak Detention Camp, there were around 500 prisoners of all races housed in 7 or 8 big sheds. Each shed contained about 100 people. Our rations were similar to those in the Taiping jail, but we had to cook our own meals. To improve our living conditions, we set up committees and went on hunger strike to demand to be allowed to buy food from outside the camp and be permitted to receive things from family members. The committees were multiracial; among the Malays, other than myself there was Osman Bakar, a PKMM member from Tanjung Rambutan.

Perhaps the prison wardens began to feel ashamed because of our hunger strike. They gathered us together and said that it was wrong for us to stop eating. We said we were only asking for a bit of freedom to receive parcels from home and to buy things from outside. Surely that should be allowed for prisoners such as us.

Five days after we began our strike, our demands were met. We were allowed to buy things from the canteen once a week and receive parcels from our families. I was impatient and argumentative with the British camp commandant during our discussions. He chastised me, saying that I was disrespectful and rude to him.

12

Camp Tanjung Beruas

After a year and a half of languishing in Pulau Jerjak Detention Camp, I was transferred to Tanjung Beruas Detention Camp in Malacca. Yes, historic Malacca where colonialism began, but also the place where Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy and I started our 'roadshow' in the campaign for independence. This was the state that inspired Dr Burhanuddin's immortal words, "The spirit of our independence is built upon the ruins of the Malacca Fort". Although I myself was moved here and there, handcuffed, chained, fenced in by stone walls and prickly barbed wire, my desire for independence never died.

The camp at Tanjung Beruas was many times bigger than Pulau Jerjak. It contained thousands of detainees divided into several blocks. Each block held from 200 to 300 persons. The blocks were divided from each other by paths and barbed wire fences approximately 12 feet high. Ahmad Boestamam and Pak Sako (Ishak Haji Muhammad) were also detained there, but in different blocks. I often discussed things with them when we had the chance to meet.

I knew Ahmad Boestamam very well, since the inauguration of PKMM in Ipoh in 1945. When PKMM moved to Kuala Lumpur, we moved there too, and even lived in the same house. Ahmad loved chatting; sometimes you never knew in

what direction his talk would wander. I recalled that before the Emergency, he suggested to me that API should launch an armed struggle. Boestamam held the same view as us: independence must be obtained via an armed struggle. Boestamam together with Abdullah C. D. and Dr Burhanuddin had discussed the formation of an armed division to fight against the British.

In Tanjung Beruas, we met again, but did not live in the same block. I was in Block K with Cik Muda from Terengganu, Cikgu Hamid from Kelantan, Ustaz Yahya Nasim from Selangor and many other members of PKMM and CPM. I was chosen by my comrades as the president of Block K.

The prison conditions at Tanjung Beruas camp were worse than at Pulau Jerjak. We were forced to carry our own nightsoil and clean the latrines. This made us all angry. So, only a week after I arrived at the camp, we set up a committee to launch a hunger strike to demand: the end to forcing prisoners to clear their own faeces, permission to buy necessities from outside and to receive parcels from our families, and to build a prayer room. On the third day of the hunger strike, the jail wardens were forced to give in and accept our demands. In addition, we were given the chance to play badminton at night and read the *Straits Times*; but *Utusan Melayu* was not allowed into the camp because the authorities considered it radical.

We had so much time on our hands in jail, it was a waste not to make use of this opportunity; moreover, idling could lead to boredom. So we ran English language classes, because many teachers who were fluent in English had been detained, and they were willing to give their services freely. I too attended these classes to improve my skills, while helping friends who were not as good. Many of us left prison able to speak and write fluent English.

During the three years I languished in Tanjung Beruas Detention Camp, there were many developments in the country. Although we were blocked from CPM news sources, by talking to police officers and jail attendants, we deduced that the anti-colonial guerrilla struggle had been launched and was proceeding vigorously. Many battles were raging here and there, and the British authorities were not getting any help. The 10th Regiment of the MNLA, the Malay guerrilla unit which I myself had attended a basic training course for, was now successfully established and growing fast—this was much discussed by us at the camp. The news made us feel more determined to keep fighting.

The anti-guerrilla war in Malaya represented a big drain on the economy for the British. The government needed the cheapest labour to build extra police stations and barracks, guard posts and suchlike in their efforts to counter the independence revolution launched by CPM via its military wing, the MNLA. Even detainees like ourselves were conscripted into these construction efforts. The British selected 12 detainees to build a police station in Caruk Batang, Jasin, Malacca. Because I knew the officer there well, I was one of those chosen for the work. But some of my comrades were unhappy about this. They felt that I was only thinking about myself and chasing after money. It was hard for me to fully refute their accusations because I had to keep my real thoughts and plans a secret.

By then, I had been languishing in detention for five-and-a-half years—six months in the Taiping, two years in Pulau Jerjak and three years in Tanjung Beruas. I recall once when I met and was interrogated by a white Special Branch officer, accompanied by the Sultan of Selangor's son. I was taken someplace away from the camp for the interrogation. They asked me various questions,

and I answered them one by one. I also asked, “Why have I been detained for so long, what convincing proof do you have of my wrongdoing?” He answered, “You are accused of being a communist”. While opening and examining the file in his hand, he continued, “You have made open speeches”. I responded, “As long as the British continue to colonize Malaya, we will keep fighting. If that’s the case, there’s nothing wrong. Many hajjis, lebais, ustaz and teachers have been branded and accused of being communists and detained. It is as though we all want to remove the British colonial government from our homeland. It isn’t wrong!”

After sometime, he asked, “How long do you reckon you will be detained for?” I replied that it was not I who arrested and detained, I was the victim and my captors were the ones who knew. “You will be detained for many years”, he said. I said, “That’s not my choice, its the wishes of my captors. But I don’t care...let’s see what happens”.

So, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that I was constantly thinking about freeing myself from the clutches of the colonial authorities. I didn’t want to die in a detention camp; I didn’t want to perish in jail. It would be disgusting to die there—an utter waste of my energy and soul. If I had to die, let it be a meaningful death: death in battle, from gunshot wounds, or from a bomb while fighting against the enemy of the motherland and race—the British. What was the use of rotting in this camp, from my youth to the end of my days? Such thoughts constantly haunted me.

But I knew I had to also think calmly and rationally. I mustn’t act like one young man from Pahang, who climbed and leapt over the barbed wire fence one night, and jumped into the sea and started swimming. The following morning he was caught and

brought back to the camp. Perhaps he was a bit crazy, following who knows what instincts. He was lucky not to have been shot by the armed guards who surrounded the camp. All of them were Malay; I felt that usually Malay soldiers wouldn't shoot at someone of their own kind. But the whole escapade, of climbing over the fence and plunging into the sea was a totally useless and foolhardy act.

So, when an opportunity arose to work outside the camp, an idea came to me that here was a chance to escape. This was why I volunteered to work. Luckily, I was accepted into a work brigade to build a police station! A total of 12 prisoners were chosen to work and we were paid a ringgit a day. At first, we went back and forth from the jail to the construction site guarded by some policemen. Around this time, I had a chance to talk to Ahmad Boestamam. He asked me, "You're working outside now, what's the idea?" I answered, "Surely, you must know, you have to know why". I invited him to join the work group and escape with me. Ahmad Boestamam rejected my offer and advised me, "General Templer (the British governor) is a cunning and wily man. You'd better be careful".

This made me think long and hard about my escape plans. According to my calculations, if General Templer was such a clever man, it was unlikely that he'd have allowed me to be a coolie working outside the camp. I was a known Communist, a member of the party which had launched the anti-British armed struggle. And, I was not just an ordinary CPM member, but a high-ranking cadre known to the public and influential to boot. So, the General was rather dumb. On the other hand, I sometimes thought that perhaps this whole thing was a trap. I considered Boestamam's advice carefully. Perhaps I was being lured and

given the bait to escape, and when I took the bait, they would shoot and kill me. My thoughts were muddled, I was restless and found it hard to sleep at night. What if this was a trap, a trap to frame me? I didn't want to die in vain, and didn't know what I should do. Every night, such thoughts went round and round my mind, but during the day, I couldn't see any evidence of any such plot to entrap me.

In the end I gathered my courage, and decided to make my escape. As the day I was planning to make a break for it approached, once again I met with Ahmad Boestamam. I wanted to tell him, and I believed that he could keep it a secret. He was a man who inspired my confidence, moreover I felt that it would not be right if I didn't inform him, especially if I was successful and the news spread; this would encourage the other detainees. As I said farewell, he sobbed while wishing me success. I knew then that he supported me; I vividly remember thinking at that moment of parting that this was the last time that we would meet. May God bless his soul.

After a week of going back and forth from the camp to the site of the police station, we were ordered to stay put at the police barracks, which were closely guarded and encircled with a barbed wire fence. We were constantly guarded by four Malay policemen led by a sergeant called Pak Mi. Pak Mi was uneasy about serving the British colonial government because he was forced to serve although he had retired. He had even attended a public rally in Malacca and heard me speak before the Emergency. So Pak Mi and I became good friends.

At lunchtime, he and the other policemen ate together with us, the political detainees. Pak Mi always brought the *Utusan Melayu* and would lend it to me. I always read the newspaper aloud for everyone. Pak Mi had once confided to me that his duty

was to keep an eye on the *kerbau balar* (white buffaloes) only, namely the whites, not the detainees.

I was also fortunate to have been a skilled worker before the Japanese Occupation, and knew quite a bit about electrical matters, building plans, and suchlike. Because of this, the site engineer also relied on me. I was made the head of the work team, and the building plans were given to me. The engineer was an Indian who sometimes did not come to work. As was the case with the British police officers. On the days when all of them didn't turn up, things were quite relaxed, with the detainees eating and drinking with the policemen, reading the papers, and chatting.

13

Escape

One of my team was a young man named Yusof from Johor. He had been a rubber tapper and had never been involved in political matters, let alone radical politics opposing the British. Yet he too was captured and detained by the authorities during the Emergency operations in 1948.

Yusof became a close friend. I explained to him our country's politics and history, emphasizing colonial harshness—Portuguese, Japanese and British—towards our motherland and people; recounted the history of our patriotic struggles against colonialists, especially, that of Datuk Maharajalela and Datuk Sagor; and about the political struggle for independence and British suppression of our fighters. I told him how their greedy pillaging of Malaya's wealth and their harsh measures caused the public to rise up and fight against them. Yusof realized that all the prisoners in the camp were political people and were patriots who were ready to sacrifice themselves for independence, which was why the British had arrested them. I also explained to him how the armed struggle in the jungles was meant to force the British to leave as soon as possible and that the guerrillas were also part of the struggle for Malayan independence.

Eventually the spirit of nationalism and independence took spark and blazed through Yusof's soul. He seemed ready to enter

the fray and take up arms for independence. I believed that with his strength of spirit, confidence and character, Yusof would become a good, brave and disciplined guerrilla in the MNLA. I no longer had any doubts about inviting him to escape with me and to join the guerrillas if there was a chance.

Near our worksite there was a Chinese coffee shop. A Chinese boy of about twelve years would bring his cows each day to graze nearby. The Chinese boy attracted my attention. It was very unusual to see a Chinese herdsboy. Did he have contact with the MNLA guerrillas? Could he help me in my escape plans? In the beginning, when I called out to the boy, he pretended to be shy. But in the end he came to me. I sang the *International* in Chinese; when he came closer, I told him that I was Rashid Maidin.

He was mysterious, but then suddenly, two days after, when he brought his cows as usual, he slipped me a letter written by a Malay comrade who was in the massworkers unit (*Min Yuen*) in the jungle nearby. Among its contents was a plan to attack the policemen guarding us so that we could escape. But I answered by saying there was no need to attack them, I had other plans. I just needed a signal, place, day and time.

I felt happy that it wasn't a trap. Only after all the arrangements had been decided upon with the guerrillas, did I tell Yusof that we were going to act the following day. To escape wasn't difficult because Sergeant Pak Mi trusted us and sometimes we weren't guarded when we went to the toilet. But, amongst our police guards, there were a few pro-British ones who could be a problem.

On the day of our planned escape, Sergeant Pak Mi and his men were having lunch with us as usual, and I pretended to have a stomach ache and asked him permission to go to the toilet. Yusof had done the same a bit earlier. So we were allowed to go to the toilet, which was about 70 to 80 metres from where we were working. I asked Pak Mi to come along and guard us, but he replied, "There's no need". "But you may get into trouble". He replied, "Oh there are no white men here".

I brought along a hammer while Yusof carried an iron tool, our weapons if any policeman decided to accompany us. But we were lucky and no one followed us. We pretended to go to the toilet, then made a detour to the Chinese coffee shop and cut the telephone line there. We ran to a nearby rubber plantation where there were three people surveying it; it was very likely that they'd recognize me as an escaped detainee. They all ran away helter skelter, abandoning their tools, food and drink—they were sure to report the incident.

From here, we walked a little way and suddenly glimpsed a red flag flapping in the breeze. We raced towards it and found some guerrillas, most likely from the 4th MNLA Regiment; about a dozen guerrillas were waiting there for us. We were successfully reunited with the massworkers and met the Malay soldier from Malacca who'd written those letters. They invited us to have some coffee first, but we said, "No! There are policemen very close by, they may come after us. Things could get difficult and dangerous. And we aren't very strong". So, the head of the section ordered the troop to move, guarding us to the left and the right; a few men were ahead and a few behind us. Thus, we were closely protected, whether we were on the move or at rest. Indeed, about ten minutes later, we heard a volley of gunfire coming from the

direction of our workplace. It seemed like Pak Mi and his men had just realized what had happened.

I feel such gratitude to the young Chinese cowherd with his revolutionary spirit whose name I don't remember, but his goodness in helping me escape is engraved in my memory. So too am I grateful to my Malay comrade from Malacca and the 4th Regiment guerrillas who helped me.

About five days after we escaped, a British plane equipped with a loudspeaker broadcast an order for me to surrender. The broadcast also maligned me and tried to scare me by saying that I was seen as a piece of rotten meat and would not be accepted by the CPM and MNLA. Thousands of leaflets were dropped over Malacca and Negri Sembilan signed by a British officer in Malacca, urging me to surrender. The leaflet said, "You should get out. We don't need you. You are poisoned meat for the CPM".

I asked my comrades for paper and wrote a response to the accusations and threats against me. I didn't post or use a messenger to deliver my letter—I left it in a spot where some British staff would see it. A few days later, I heard an army bulletin saying that I had left a letter. It was not just the British soldiers who were talking about it, the contents of my letter were also spreading as a rumour among the public. If I am not mistaken, my letter said, "End this Emergency right away. You have wreaked havoc upon and brought suffering to the people of Malaya. It is you, the British colonizers, who should return to your country".

This was the truth: Malay and Chinese villages were being emptied of people. Abandoned fruit trees were left for the squirrels. Deserted paddy fields were torched by the British. People were forced to move out of their homes with only the clothes on their backs, their pots and pans, into fenced-off camps

that the authorities sealed each night. Early morning movement was forbidden. There was no independence, no freedom, and much suffering—this was the disaster brought about by the return of the British colonizers to Malaya. The Chinese suffered the most. Their families were broken up because of the oppressive British measures. Some had the chance to flee into the jungles and join the MNLA. Others were expelled from the country and forcibly sent to China. Some rotted in detention camps while many others languished in the New Villages fenced in with barbed wire and guarded by sentries.

If this was not enough, this burning of homes and destruction of villages, rampaging soldiers working for the British forces acted cruelly and mercilessly—many people were killed and their heads were chopped off and displayed along the main roads. I saw this myself in my journey from Malacca to Penang. It deeply upset me, but all I could do was shake my head.

So, these were the people who called *me* a piece of rotten meat! On the contrary, I was greeted with much warmth by the *Min Yuen* massworkers and moved around from place to place to meet friends until I reached the Central Committee. Wherever I went, I felt the loyalty of my comrades. Almost one year later, I reached Kerdu, Pahang and was reunited with the 10th Regiment and Abdullah C. D. I left Yusof behind in Malacca because he wanted to proceed to Johor and join the guerrillas there, since he was from that state where there were many Malay guerrillas led by Mat Indera; I agreed with Yusof's plans.

14

Joining Forces with Abdullah C. D.

To return to my escape, once I'd been reunited with the massworkers, I asked for help from the local representative to meet with Abdullah C. D. at the 10th Regiment in Pahang. Although I was not used to being in the jungle, I strengthened my resolve and spirit to meet up with the troop that was the pride of the Malays. I made a vow that I would not shave my beard and sideburns until I met up with the regiment.

The journey from Malacca to Pahang was no simple matter; we could not use the main roads or take any form of transport. We could only walk! We had to climb hills and mountains, trudge across valleys and wade through rivers. Several times we were embroiled in skirmishes or attacked by enemy forces—their army as well as their air force. Under these circumstances, I was moved along from one troop to another: some large and some small, sometimes we had to retreat because of enemy attacks. At other times, we had to wait long periods before recommencing our journey. During this long journey, there were times when I came across young Malay comrades who had been involved with me in the same activities before the Emergency, like Jasman from Johor who was also at the All-Malaya Camp in Kerdu.

Despite all the hardship, we also had a lot of fun. When conditions permitted, in each place I reached, welcome parties

were held to celebrate my arrival. My journey began in Malacca, then we moved to Negeri Sembilan, but later I had to backtrack to Malacca. While I was in Negeri Sembilan, several traitorous guerrillas had turned themselves in to the British. If the traitors were not eliminated straightaway, our secret would definitely be out and the enemy would launch a huge attack. We had to move. If we kept going northwards, the enemy was very likely to barricade our way or plan an ambush. We had to revert to guerrilla tactics, to take “one step forward and two steps backwards”, so we returned to Malacca.

Also, there were relatively fewer British units in Malacca, since they were concentrated in Negeri Sembilan, where they used a strategy of encirclement and continual bombing. How could we engage openly against such a numerous enemy that was so well-equipped with weapons of war? The British armed forces had of all kinds of soldiers: whites, blacks and Gurkhas. Just the name Gurkha made me feel nauseous—they were no other and no less than hired mercenaries of the British.

When things quietened down, I returned to Negeri Sembilan, I can't recall exactly where it was—was it Batu Kikir or Kuala Kelawang? All I knew was that it was somewhere in Negeri Sembilan. I didn't want to ask at the time. This was a form of discipline, not asking the name of a village or river, and slipping in unobtrusively, so as not to arouse the villagers' suspicions. Most of the locals were Chinese, with a sprinkling of Malays. But all those who looked after my safety and well-being were Chinese. We were camped up on a hill and the water was in the valley below. I was not allowed to go to the river or well by myself even for a bath. Instead, every day they fetched water up for my personal use. I felt uneasy, a guest being treated like

a master, while the local people were like coolies. So I said, “There’s no need to bring the water up to me. I will go down and take my bath together with everyone else”. They answered, “You can’t, *datuk*, you cannot go down to the village”. They called me *datuk*. The story was that before the Emergency, while I was in the CPM Propaganda Team in Perak, we often held shows where I played the character of Dato’ Onn—a reactionary who was anti-independence. So, the title stuck to me.

After walking and walking for months on end, finally I reached Betong, Pahang and met Chin Peng. Abdullah C. D. was there having a meeting with him. So, almost a year after I set out from Malacca, I finally met up with Abdullah C. D. again. From Betong we headed for the 10th Regiment in Semantan, Temerloh.

Arriving at the 10th Regiment, I was welcomed as a cadre and warrior. They held a celebration to mark my successful escape from British detention. At that moment, I felt such pride and happiness at returning to the fold of the regiment which I’d long been hoping to join, and I shaved my sideburns which had grown quite long. From then on, I entered the battle, fighting alongside the commanders and soldiers of the 10th Regiment.

Like all the other soldiers in the 10th Regiment, I was given specific duties. I was made one of the leaders of the 10th Regiment as well as the leader of one unit of 12 massworkers operating in villages around Kuala Krau, Temerloh District, in Pahang.

My experiences during my successful escape and after represented a completely new direction for me. Before this, my work had been that of open political agitation. I had had only one or two weeks of military training just before the declaration of Emergency Law. It was difficult for me to accept and shoulder my

new responsibilities, but when the party ordered me to take up those duties, I didn't question them, and accepted them willingly and with determination. Later, I was tasked with leading a company—each company consisted of three platoons, each of which had 30 or 40 people. So I was in charge of around 100 guerrillas. War, battles and skirmishes were not the problem. These were all things that soldiers with their endless zeal anticipated. The real problem was that of logistics, which was becoming increasingly difficult. Logistics was not organized by the party leadership, but was the responsibility of the lower-ranking cadres, especially those who operating underground. They had to supply clothes, necessities, foodstuffs, drink, medicines, emergency and marching rations and suchlike. This was not the work of the leaders, but I had to know about it. I had to have accurate logistics reports and I had to assign this job to those I fully trusted.

Discipline in the party and in the guerrilla army was very strict. We followed a centralized democracy. We discussed problems and expressed our feelings in public, but when a decision had been made, everyone had to follow. The upper echelons listened to and were sensitive to matters regarding those below them, while those below them would receive orders and guidance from above. We did not implement a full and open arbitrary democratic system. How could we do so during a time of war, when secrets had to be kept? If secret information was revealed to our enemies, death and destruction would surely follow.

The MNLA soldiers were also no longer children. They joined as adults, already able to bear arms and in their late teens and twenties. Some were even in their thirties or forties. We had no way of measuring their loyalty, or how long they would agree to be part of the revolution with us. God willing! Thus, we could not

run it in a purely democratic manner and decisions came from the centre.

And discipline was really needed. If any soldiers went AWOL, we kept an eye on them closely. Some actually ran away. If we caught them, they were eradicated quickly. And when that happened, we also had to move away, because our position was exposed and the enemy would sooner or later attack us. The soldiers also kept a close watch on those who went astray. We discussed such matters at length and deeply. The troops would get angry at the leaders when they were not sensitive and didn't listen to their fears, because it was not only the regiment but also themselves who were in danger of the terrible consequences. So, we had to take action, and investigate. If it was true that individuals were violating the rules and endangering the safety of the other guerrillas, or even worse, in contact with the enemy, we had no choice but to execute these ghosts. The whole subject made us heavy-hearted. Outsiders didn't see and didn't understand; they looked upon it simply as a murder of a human being. But they didn't know why the person was condemned to death. This was the reality of the armed struggle—we didn't just have to kill our obvious enemies, but were also forced to kill the enemies in our midst. Our own warriors would accuse us of wrongdoing for plotting with enemy agents if we didn't.

At the end of 1952, the British administration launched a new campaign to starve the MNLA. Despite all their efforts, the 10th Regiment did not face starvation, only hardship and difficulty in finding food and supplies. Although the masses in all kinds of villages wanted to help us, few could do so now. To overcome this, Abdullah C. D. organized a production brigade, which was how we had some extra food supplies. One day, while I was

working in Kuala Krau, I received a letter from Abdullah C. D. asking me to quickly return to the 10th Regiment in Semantan and then proceed with him for a party meeting. Two comrades and I set out at once for the base. On our way, we came face to face with a group of policemen—fighting broke out. During the shooting, I was injured in one foot and one of my comrades was killed. I had to be helped back to the headquarters. But because I had to go to the meeting, and there was no place for me to rest and heal my wound, I needed to keep moving. I had to use a walking stick while accompanying Abdullah to the congress.

15

A Strategic Move to the North

At the CPM congress, it was declared that the MNLA was going to make a strategic retreat to the north of the country. The 10th Regiment had to prepare itself for the move. I was ordered to go to Perak and to take charge of the northern branch of the Department of Malay Work.

And so it was that I, along with several Malay comrades, went to Perak. After barely two months with the 10th Regiment, I had to split up with them temporarily because of my battle orders. My team joined our comrades at the CPM newspaper unit in Perak; this unit consisted of only a few people, of all races—Malays, Chinese and Indians. Our work involved printing newspapers as well as planting crops alongside the Orang Asli.

Sometime around the end of 1953, the main body of the 10th Regiment, the Hang Jebat company, reached us; we were overjoyed. Abdullah C. D., Musa Ahmad, Suriani Abdullah and others came and mingled with us. To clarify our subsequent battle orders, we met with the Secretary-General of the Perak CPM. Suriani Abdullah (Eng Ming Ching) was our translator at this meeting—she was fluent in both Chinese and English. She was tasked with helping the Hang Jebat troop coordinate with the other MNLA divisions during the journey, organize supplies,

medicines, necessities and other things. Sometimes she also helped to coordinate the units in the area.

Since our contact with the northern Perak section was broken off, with the agreement of the Secretary-General of the state, we moved to the Ulu Kinta area, a journey which took almost ten days. There was a huge rock cave which was big enough to contain more than thirty people. Orang Asli gardens were scattered all over the area, in the valleys and on the hill slopes, among interconnected Orang Asli villages. They were strong supporters of the MNLA and loathed the British, despite the fact that there was even one Orang Asli troop (the Senoi Pra'aq) working with the British forces. So, food was no longer a problem. Our Orang Asli brethren delivered potatoes and other crops to the troops, even turning over their gardens to us.

At first, we slept in the big cave alongside the Orang Asli, but several days later the local CPM leader had a meeting with us. The decisions made at that meeting included: organizing the local Orang Asli, as well as carefully studying their traditional customs and ways, printing our newspaper, and conducting mass work among the people in the Sungai Siput area. So, we divided our energies into several teams: Abdullah C. D. led one team to organize and study the Perak Orang Asli. Musa Ahmad and I led another team to print our publications, arrange broadcasts and organize and study Orang Asli society in Kelantan. Abu Samah Mohd Kassim was tasked with leading a mass organizing team in the Sungai Siput area.

Abu Samah's story is interesting. In the jungle, his name was Sibar. It was our custom to change our names when we entered the jungle, or whenever we moved; we even changed our pseudonyms. This was one of our tactics to avoid detection

by enemy spies. Local people would not know our real names, so even if they revealed our secrets, the authorities would not know our true identities. If the British spies uncovered our true identities, they would unleash all their might upon us.

Abu Samah Mohd Kassim @ Sibar had been a PKMM member, then pulled in by the head of UMNO Youth in Temerloh to be a member of the Youth branch in Temerloh. Hence, he was a member of two parties simultaneously. When the British launched the Emergency, orders were issued to capture Abu Samah alive. Abu Samah was a guerrilla in the 10th Regiment from its earliest days. One day, responding to a message from his mother, Abu Samah went to her home. It was a trap—his mother's house was surrounded by government troops. Shots were exchanged, and one soldier grabbed Abu Samah in a stranglehold. He put up a mighty fight and escaped from soldier after hurling a grenade.

While Abu Samah was organizing the masses in Sungai Siput, Musa Ahmad and I led a group of comrades to higher ground about one hour away from the cave and set up a temporary camp. All the staff—the writers and translators, the stencil-cutters, the typists, and the printers—worked determinedly to restart our various publications.

16

With the Orang Asli

Other than publishing newspapers, we sent teams to organize the Orang Asli in Ulu Kelantan, whose leader was Datuk Angoi. Datuk Angoi himself would often drop by and chat with us in the office. Because of our close ties, one day we held a small ceremony to seal our friendship. Datuk Angoi himself became the Orang Asli representative, while I represented our group. I was called Datuk. Thus, we two Datuks met and pledged to continue our friendship.

We also held a party, at which the warriors and Orang Asli people sang and danced together to the music and rhythms of bamboo instruments. In all the excitement and high spirits, one soldier even tripped and fell into the fire and hurt himself slightly. It was only when dawn broke that we parted to go about our respective daily duties.

Datuk Angoi and his people strongly supported us. Every day we were sent potatoes and other crops, which were carried by the Orang Asli from Ulu Kelantan. To lighten their burden, Musa Ahmad and I arranged for a team of ten men, headed by Awang Ibrahim, to carry the potatoes alongside the Orang Asli from Ulu Kelantan to the camp.

In the midst this period of our warm relations and cooperation with the Orang Asli, on the afternoon of 7 July 1954, Abu Samah's

team returned to camp to report that a cadre named Sulaiman Songsang had surrendered to the enemy and the whereabouts of the 10th Regiment was no longer a secret. Before we had a chance to decide what to do, the next morning airplanes flew overhead, dropping bombs, firing rockets, and spraying the jungles with gunfire. Their main target was the big cave which had been our local camp.

In the face of this crisis, Abdullah C. D. ordered the troops to quickly move from the area. We were guided by Pandak, one of Datuk Angoi's sons. Not long after we had evacuated the area, the sky was filled with parachutes. The enemy was sending in its paratroopers to attack us.

We were led across rivers, up hills and down through valleys. About two weeks later, we all met up again at an Orang Asli base. The team led by Awang also arrived, guided by Datuk Angoi himself.

The base was safe from enemy encirclement, however, there were other problems. We had limited supplies, there were few farms in the area, and we had not yet received orders to proceed north. We were also unsure of the conditions that lay ahead. So we held a meeting to pool our ideas. Abdullah C. D. said that we should divide our group into two troops. He himself would guide the advance troop to clear the way north, while Musa and I would lead the remaining troop and stay on in the Orang Asli area. I understood this as a strategic order, to prevent catastrophe and exhaustion from befalling us and I agreed. Musa Ahmad, however, didn't open his mouth to say anything, either for or against. Perhaps he was confused. Nevertheless, since I agreed with Abdullah C. D.'s plan, that carried the day, since it was two against one.

And so the regiment was split up: Abdullah C. D. headed north, while we stayed behind with the Orang Asli to await news from the advance troop. The scouts told us that the advance team was suffering from food shortages, while those of us left behind were not going hungry since there was enough tapioca and other vegetables to feed our troop.

Once, when Musa and I were talking about war and other things, Musa said revealingly, “I am prepared to be shot at like you, as long as I don’t die”.

This gave me a very poor impression of Musa since whoever entered the jungle to take up arms against the British should be willing to sacrifice everything, including his or her own life and soul to liberate the motherland. Indeed, that would be honourable. As a leader, Musa really should not have been thinking like this. I merely replied, “Who wants to die? In war everything is confused, and sacrifice is normal”.

17

Arrival in Dusun Nyiur, Southern Thailand

A few weeks later, a message reached us to rejoin the advance party led by Abdullah C. D. We did not face the same problems as they had. At Sungai Belum, we were provided with rice and buffalo meat, but Kampung Belum itself was an empty shell. Its inhabitants had been forcibly relocated by the British colonial troops. Their homes had been burnt to the ground, their fruit trees cut down, and many livestock animals had been shot dead. So it seemed that our food supply was the remnants of a British campaign of destruction.

After a few days' rest, we pushed along towards Kampung Hala, which had suffered the same fate as Kampung Belum. There was enough food for us, organized by a local leader. We rested here a little, waiting for our new orders to come through. We slaughtered some buffalo and pounded paddy for rations as well as to celebrate our victorious strategic journey.

I had begun this journey in Perak, hence, I had not experienced some of the obstacles which Abdullah C. D. and the Hang Jebat unit had faced. This was said to be the first strategic manoeuvre made by the 10th Regiment in the history of its anti-British armed struggle to free our motherland.

The battlefield was continually advancing on us. As the leaders of the 10th Regiment, we could not linger too long there,

only a few days for a meeting with Chin Peng and the rest of the Central Committee to receive our new instructions and duties, as well as guidelines on coping with the new conditions. After I received my instructions, I quickly went back to guide my team to carry out these new duties.

I rejoined the troops before Abdullah C. D. After I returned, Suriani and Musa Ahmad left to meet with the Central Committee. Abu Samah and I, and many other comrades, were asked to start settlements around Dusun Nyiur. Upon our arrival at Air Keruh, we met a group of massworkers who had been there for a while. Ibrahim Chik and several Malay comrades had reached this border area earlier. We joined forces with Ibrahim Chik, while the massworkers were moved to another area. Abu Samah and other comrades set up Malay villages around the Malayan-Thai border.

Setting up and organizing a new village was no easy matter. It not only required courage, patience and determination, but even more it needed highly disciplined troops, an idealistic work ethic, mutual respect between the troops and the masses, and an ability to mobilize the masses, among other things. When we first arrived, the villagers gave us a frosty welcome. Perhaps British agents had long infiltrated the border areas, particularly amongst the Malays in southern Thailand. These agents would have spread all kinds of slander about the MNLA to confuse the local people.

Things began to change after we had worked hard to gain the confidence of the locals, helping them with fever medicines and so on. The comrades were instructed to search for firewood, rattan and traditional herbal roots and other things to bring as gifts to the villagers. Within a short space of time, we earned the

trust and sympathy of the locals. Only after this did we launch several programmes for their welfare, such as communal projects, cleanliness and health campaigns, organized them to cultivate the land and keep livestock, set up a *madrrasah*, and so on.

Before we arrived, the area was rife with robbery, muggings and other social ills. But after we brought order to the area, such crimes ceased. We set up various mass organizations, for instance, for youth, women and children. And so the villages developed, economically as well as in terms of the people's unity. The area became our base. What happened here spread rapidly by word of mouth; people came from all over the border area to meet us, some to invite us to their villages, others to ask for medical treatment or for other reasons.

18

Wak Mat Tinggal

One day in 1955, when Kamal (Ibrahim Chik) and I were camped with our unit at a place we called High Mountain Camp, about an hour's journey from Abdullah C. D. and Musa Ahmad's unit, we spotted smoke in front of the camp. Where was it coming from?

I asked two guards to go and investigate. One of the guards soon returned and reported that there was an old man with a rifle outside, asking to join us. The other guard was waiting with him outside.

I asked the guard to invite him to enter. The old man came in and told us his name was Wak Mat Tinggal. He had escaped from Narathiwat gaol and had come in search of us. "Whatever happens to Wak, Wak will still follow this troop".

This was a dilemma for me, because our policy then was not to accept any new recruits. But whatever I said, this Wak was not going to accept and would not leave. Whether we liked it or not, we were forced to take him in. He told us that he was 55 years old.

We taught him to become a good person, to serve the people wholeheartedly, study hard, work and train. Wak was determined, began to study the alphabet and subsequently learnt to read and write. His world view rapidly changed and he progressed fairly quickly in his studies.

In the second half of 1955, the 10th Regiment received several new directives from the Central Committee, among them, to send Musa Ahmad and two others overseas to study. I was to leave for Betong to meet Chin Peng and attend a meeting with representatives of Tunku Abdul Rahman's government.

19

With Chin Peng at the Baling Talks

Midway through 1955, the Central Committee appointed me to be one CPM's representatives at the talks with the Malayan government, scheduled to be held in Baling on 28 and 29 December that year. I took leave of the regiment and headed for Betong where the other two representatives, Chin Peng and Chen Tien, were waiting.

Before setting off for the talks, we had deeply thought about, studied, and discussed all the problems and issues which would arise at the Baling talks. We were all quite certain that our major aim would not be agreed to at the talks, that is, the recognition of CPM as a legitimate political party, which would enable us to participate in Malayan politics like all the other parties. To do this, we would have to agree to a ceasefire, indeed to lay down our arms and be completely engaged in politics. A secondary objective of the talks was to diminish British power over Malaya in order to prepare for the independence of our homeland.

The second objective was likely to be achieved by the Baling talks. After the era of Dato' Onn bin Jaafar, UMNO was led by Tunku Abdul Rahman—a vocal proponent of “*Merdeka*”! If the CPM, with its anti-British armed struggle, and UMNO, waging an open political struggle for independence, could reach an understanding or an alliance on this issue, then the demands

for independence would be stronger and more invincible and the British would be further alienated from the masses. Clearly, this meeting with the CPM showed that it could no longer be denied that there was a recognition of the emergence and role of political parties in Malaya. So, for us, negotiating was better than hiding, and politically, it meant that we would not be depicted as bogeymen who were against peace; indeed, we could display our true identity as a patriotic party.

If we were to reject the offer to come to the Baling talks, on the other hand, it would be capitalized upon by the British. We would be branded as stubborn, uncivilized terrorists. All sorts of other accusations would be hurled at us by the British in their propaganda war. After weighing everything up fully, we agreed that there were many advantages to attending the talks, even if they were sure to end in a stalemate.

In order for the talks to take place, the Malayan government and the CPM had agreed to a ceasefire zone between Klian Intan and Baling. Our delegation consisted of Chin Peng as the head, Chen Tien and myself as members, and a 10th Regiment comrade as the chief guard, accompanied by Chinese comrades. We were welcomed by Captain John Davis at the edge of the jungle in a tin mining area near Klian Intan. Davis had been in Force 136, the British guerrilla troop that had worked with the CPM during the anti-Japanese war.

Captain Davis had entered Malaya secretly by submarine during the Japanese Occupation. He had connected up with the

MPAJA and helped it to obtain arms. A large amount of military equipment was parachuted in to the guerrilla areas. Some weapons were handed to Force 136 under Davis, while the rest were hidden for the use of the MPAJA.

So, Captain Davis knew comrade Chin Peng well, and was even fluent in Chinese. Hence he was assigned to safeguard us in our journey from Klian Intan to Baling. There were also other members of the British forces as well as Gurkhas in the area. One of the British officers said that he was tired of the fighting, and he hoped that the war would end quickly. I agreed with him.

From our point of view, there were two things guaranteeing the safety of our CPM contingent. First, we had positioned a hundred armed men, broken up into several smaller groups, at various strategic spots. The second was Captain Davis himself. If the British were to betray us, Captain Davis would die. We also calculated that although we were their greatest foes, the British were not brave enough to jeopardize our safety. The British surely wanted to appear to be gentlemen who were neither evil nor treacherous.

But we did not want the talks to go on for too long, nor in a manner that was too hurried and pressured. Three days was enough. From Klian Intan we were taken in a vehicle to a smaller area, where we changed vehicle to head to Baling; both times, the vehicle used was a Black Maria, usually used to transport prisoners. Perhaps the colonialists wanted to insult us. I felt angry, but did not argue since Captain Davis too climbed into the same van. Also it was better to keep quiet to smoothen the way for the talks ahead. We travelled to Baling in a convoy, with an escort in front and behind; the OCPD of Baling followed us. To the right and left along the way, the public thronged the streets. They

pushed and shoved to get a glimpse of us. Shouts of “Merdeka! Merdeka!” could clearly be heard even from inside the van. I was greatly encouraged at seeing the people, and it was truly touching to hear their cries for independence. We waved back at them in greeting and to thank them for their welcome.

Our convoy travelled at moderate speed, until we reached Baling and went straight to the Baling English School where the meeting was to be held. Tens of thousands of people had gathered, but they were held back by barbed wire and army and police guards. Our delegation was housed in a small room. The government provided us with food and necessary items.

I suddenly heard my name being called from the throng outside. I came out but couldn't see anyone at first. Then I realized that it was my little brother, Yusof Maidin, whom I had not seen for seven years.

In the afternoon (I don't remember what time), the three of us—Chin Peng, Chen Tien and myself—were invited by Captain Davis to the negotiating table. We headed to the meeting hall in an atmosphere of tense silence, without greetings or handshakes. We sat down in our chairs face to face with the representatives of the federal government. I can still remember well that the government delegation consisted of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Tan Cheng Lock, David Marshall, Hamid Jumat from Singapore and other representatives whom I did not know. During the proceedings, no water or tea was served. Perhaps this was deliberate: if we drank tea together, it would seem too convivial. We too preferred it this way, thinking that the less food and drink we were served, the less likely we were to be poisoned.

We were also aware that Tunku Abdul Rahman did not have real power to make any decisions and agreements with us. At

the time, he was merely the Chief Minister of the Federation of Malaya, a puppet, while the British colonial government truly held strategic control over the army, police and economy. The British wanted to use the Tunku as a political weapon in their strategy to defeat us. Meanwhile, the Tunku was a clever man, and was taking this opportunity to strengthen his standing with the British to demand for independence. It was no surprise that the Tunku did not recklessly condemn us as did David Marshall, the Jewish Chief Minister of Singapore, who felt that if he kept repeatedly attacking us like a feral boar, he would be trusted and loved by his masters, the British.

And it was the same with Tun Tan Cheng Lock. We paid no heed to their condemnations of us. The Tunku spoke and introduced the proposal for us to lay down our arms and surrender: CPM was to be outlawed forever and its members and the MNLAs guerrillas would be processed, that is, be investigated by the British Special Branch and were sure to be sent to jail.

Clearly, we could not accept such conditions. So, after the Tunku had finished speaking, Chin Peng responded:

We from the CPM wish for peace, however this peace has to be one that is fair to us. We have bathed in blood fighting against the Japanese fascists, shoulder to shoulder with the British. When the Second World War ended, the British returned to colonize us and launched the Emergency and suppressed us with ferocity. We were forced to take up arms again and bathe in blood to defend our party's existence. Hence it is not reasonable to demand that we surrender and put into temporary camps. Something seems suspicious here. If we can be at peace, then we have to have a just peace, which at the very least respects the dignity of our struggle for independence. I doesn't matter,

Tunku, we don't need to argue here, Tunku even doesn't have the power to make any decision about us. After independence, then we can resume negotiating this at length.

Tunku answered briefly. "Hmm, it doesn't matter really, if you think you don't want this, it doesn't matter".

The finer details of the discussions by both sides are no longer clear in my mind, but to summarize, the Tunku's delegation strongly wanted us to surrender and accept the ban on the CPM, without giving in to our demands in the slightest or trying to find another way. On our part, we held on to two principles, and if not for both of these unfair conditions, an agreement could have been reached with ease.

Nevertheless, both sides agreed to continue with the meeting after independence. The CPM delegation were supportive of Tunku's contingent going to London to discuss independence with the British.

When the talks at Baling reached a stalemate, our delegation was delivered back to the jungles near Klian Intan to continue our battle.

Not long after our return to the jungles, the British forces mounted a campaign to surround and eradicate us by tracking us down, spreading propaganda and aerial broadcasts, which, among other things, called upon us to surrender and offered rewards for us, dead or alive, and bombing our suspected jungle camps.

I did not return to the 10th Regiment right away but stayed on with Chin Peng to follow developments and wait for the next round of talks after independence.

While I was based at the camp in comrade Chin Peng's area in Sadao in 1959, I became attracted to a Chinese female guerrilla. I got to know her better and proposed to her, "I'd like to marry you, what do you think?" Her answer was brief, "Eh, wait a little, I want to think it over first". I too wanted to think it over, but we were from the same troop and saw each other daily. In the end, she accepted. After we had both made up our minds to get married, we had to write a letter to ask permission from the party leadership, followed by a meeting where the members could express their feelings, in case anyone was uneasy or opposed our marriage. But no one opposed it, and we had an Islamic marriage—her Muslim name is Selamah bin Abdullah.

After our marriage, Selamah and I moved to the Malay village in the Thai sector. There, Selamah gradually began to learn our Malay language and customs. Selamah's mother was actually of Malay descent and had married a young Chinese in Singapore. Then they had moved to Perlis and opened a tailor's shop, sewing clothes and making *songkok*. She was not from a poor family, but they were not rich either. It was a large family, with eight children. When the British launched the Emergency, her mother, father and several siblings were rounded up and deported to China. One of her brothers ran away to Thailand, while Selamah and two others fled to the jungle to join the guerrillas. She still has brothers and sisters in Perlis, in Thailand and in China.

Returning to the Baling talks, I can say that they were not negotiations in the real sense of the word. Negotiating means

discussing in order to reach an agreement or find a way which is agreeable to both sides. Instead, these talks were characterized by trying to suppress us by imposing various kinds of conditions such as surrender, detention, interrogation, and the banning of the party—there was not the slightest bit of give and take.

The talks were thus bound to fail. In any case, it was understood that the Malayan government was forced to follow British orders at the time. Even if Tunku had wished sincerely to end the war, he could not have made any decision without the blessings of the British.

I recalled one incident during the talks. Tunku had not been seated very long at his desk, and then had left to go who knows where. Chen Tien asked me, “Hey, Rashid have you seen Tunku?” I replied, “I haven’t seen him, maybe there’s a problem”. Chen Tien suggested, “Come on, let’s go and take a look”. So we both left the room and peeked into the one next to it. There was a white officer sitting there glumly. We surmised that he was controlling Tunku. When the talks restarted, we said to the Tunku, “There’s a white man in the next room, would you believe?” Tunku replied simply, “Oh its nothing, don’t pay an attention to it...” This meant he didn’t want to acknowledge that he was being controlled closely by the British authorities, but we were wise in these matters.

The truth was that Tunku Abdul Rahman attended the talks under certain British conditions. Among the most important of these was that he could not make any final decisions. Because we understood the reality, our side and the Tunku’s promised to hold further talks after independence, since we felt that only after this could we find a way to resolve this without foreign interference.

But what happened was the reverse. Even after Independence, Tunku's government was still tied to various conditions imposed by the British and had to continue the war.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Tunku was a cunning man. After the Baling talks, he never vilified us. For two years, while waiting for the Independence talks in London, Tunku never opposed or slandered us. So, our armed strength was also used as a weapon by Tunku when he confronted the British government with the independence demands. The Tunku reportedly boasted, "This time we are the boss. *Di dalam pun ada, di luar pun ada* (We have the power in the interior, we have it outside)". He was referring to us, the CPM, in the jungle with our arms, while outside, there was his party, UMNO. These were his political strengths in the face of British power in London in his pursuit of independence.

20

Joining the 10th Regiment at the Border

Chin Peng said, "...we will fight to our last drop of blood!" This was among the final statements made during the Baling talks when the Malayan government strongly insisted on the surrender of the CPM/MNLA. When it became clear that the government wished to continue its hostilities, I returned to the 10th Regiment to join Abdullah C.D. and others to continue our struggle. We vowed that, as long as the government continued to stubbornly insist on imposing unfair conditions on us, we would continue to fight. We would prefer to fight to the last man.

To expedite our armed struggle, in 1962, the Central Committee decided to hold a large-scale gathering at the 10th Regiment called the First Northern Party School. Those who attended were the Special Forces, the 12th Regiment, the 8th Regiment, and the Special Area Regiment.

The 10th Regiment acted as hosts to this large gathering, providing all necessary supplies and facilities. The comrades and cadres of the 10th Regiment worked hard day and night to accommodate the visiting platoons. The leaders of the 10th Regiment together with the other leaders held a Central Committee meeting and delivered the New Party Guidelines. There were also talks, political courses, military training and other activities.

The First Northern Party School was one of our first attempts in the border area which achieved our aim of firming up our will to fight on, organizing our troops, and continuing our armed struggle. In line with the new directives to advance step by step, I was chosen to lead and build a base in the Special Region. My group arrived when the 10th Regiment was holding a large gathering of all its units and associations. We received a very warm welcome. At that historic meeting, Abdullah C. D., represented the MNLA High Command and the 1st Regiment headquarters at the setting up of the 14th Frontline Platoon under Abu Samah Mohd Kassim. After this platoon had left for Ulu Kelantan, Abdullah C. D. also officiated over the 15th Frontline Platoon, under me, which was to operate in the border between Kelantan and Thailand; we were to expand our struggle and launch various programmes on both sides of the border as well as coordinate closely with the main 10th Regiment.

Between 1973–76, in the eastern sector of the border area, there were two big platoons from the 10th Regiment, that is the base and the 15th Platoons. (The 14th operated in Kelantan). Both platoons worked extremely closely as partners in the same war. They helped each other, supported each other and learnt from each other. They often undertook various actions as assigned by the party and achieved satisfactory results.

21

Abdullah C. D. Falls III

In the midst of all this, in 1975, I was astonished by news from base camp on our wireless that Abdullah C. D. was seriously ill. Suriani Abdullah, his wife, had also fallen ill but evidently could withstand the poison slipped to them by a saboteur within the ranks. Various questions haunted me when I heard the news: Abdullah C. D., the Political Commissar of the 10th Regiment and my close friend in battle, was in grave danger. How was he? How could we help, and what was happening with his regiment? These thoughts weighed heavily upon me.

I quickly dispatched some soldiers with whatever was needed—medicines, supplies and other things to help him. I myself left in the dead of the night through the jungle to the base camp to visit him and offer my support. I found him in a grave condition, unable even to speak.

Although Suriani too had fallen ill, she was not as badly affected and was still working very hard. She had taken over all the party work as well as leadership of the regiment, in addition to her own duties. Each day, she oversaw various regimental matters: military, political, living conditions; organized work and production brigades, mass units, underground work; and liaised with the 14th/15th Independent Platoons and various 10th Regiment units, as well as with the Main Base. She worked late into the night.

The Central Committee sent various medicines, and an experienced doctor as well as a leader to help with the 10th Regiment's work. He held that responsibility until 1978. In the middle of 1976, Abu Samah led the 14th Regiment back to the base to jointly lead the work of the troops.

As a result of all this painstaking and sincere help from various quarters and the troops themselves, Abdullah C. D.'s health gradually improved. Seeing that the work of the troops was going smoothly and that Abdullah was recovering his health, I began to feel more at peace.

Towards the end of 1976, under the orders of the Politburo, the base camp was moved from Weang to Sukhirin. Only the 15th Independent Platoon was left operating in the area. In addition, the enemy had launched a major attack on the Weang base camp in early 1977. I led my platoon all over the area in this game of tag with the enemy: when they attacked, we withdrew, when they withdrew, we attacked.

The newly arrived troop at Sukhirin sent a team to successfully attack the enemy from outside the lines. The enemy quickly ended its campaign of attack and I led the 15th Independent Platoon to the Sukhirin district, working shoulder to shoulder with the base platoon.

22

The Haadyai Peace Talks

In the 1980s, conditions within and outside Malaysia were changing in a major way. The country and people needed peace and prosperity to keep developing and enjoy independence. Yet the war inside the country, bequeathed by the colonial power, was an obstacle to the progress and dignity of the nation.

The Anti-British War of Independence was the strongest threat to British colonial power; since it erupted in 1948, the colonial power had not spared any efforts to wipe it out, but they had failed. In fact, the conflict spread. In the 1950s, under the continuous encouragement of the armed struggle, various non-military anti-colonial fronts also developed. Both kinds of struggle had forced the British to recognize the independence of the Federation of Malaya in 1957. Clearly, this independence was the fruit of the joint efforts of all the Malayan peoples from various parties and organizations fighting for freedom. It was tinged with the blood spilt in the MNLA/CPM's battles for independence.

Clearly, Tunku Abdul Rahman was compelled to follow the instructions of the British, accepting various conditions, including the continuation of the war against the anti-British fighters. With the aid of the ex-colonizers, Tunku had continued the war. Tunku did not succeed in eradicating the guerrilla struggle. Put differently, Tunku wanted the war, and did not want peace and

development for the nation. This strategy was continued by (subsequent Malaysian prime ministers) Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn.

The fighting which dragged on after Independence was in truth something that was deliberately continued by the government. We, the side which defended the armed struggle, always kept the door as wide open as possible for further dialogue with a view to ending the war and developing the nation, as long as it was on a fair and reasonable basis. Those were the principles we had held steadfastly since the Baling talks.

The government of Dr Mahathir Mohamad seemed to understand that if it continued with the colonial strategy, the development of the nation would be hindered, the economy would not grow, and the nation would not be able to fully reap the fruits of its independent status.

Hence, the door towards ending the war inside the country and towards peace gradually opened. In 1988, early meetings were held between Abdullah C. D., representing the 10th Regiment, and Ghafar Baba, representing the Barisan Nasional (BN) government. In earlier decades, both men had been personally involved in the PKMM's independence work. Given their common background, the common desire, that is to end the war and create peace, was mutually understood and agreed upon. To move forward, high level negotiations were held.

In the series of discussions with the governments of Malaysia and Thailand, I was once again chosen to represent CPM. The Baling talks had failed in 1955, now we were to hold a round of talks in Phuket. One thing I must mention is that the Royal Thai Government as hosts during the negotiations displayed

friendliness and sincerity, during the discussions as well as in the arrangements, including meeting us and taking us to and from the jungle.

In order to simplify discussions and decision-making between the 10th Regiment leaders, we gathered all our units in one central camp. The meeting involved the core 10th Regiment force, the 14 and 15th Independent Platoons as well as all the massworker units. We had to prepare ourselves fully not only to attend the negotiations but also to face them. All those present were informed about the issues. They unanimously agreed that the negotiations had to be based on fair and reasonable principles. If we were forced to surrender, the 10th Regiment would carry on fighting. Zainun @ Ah Yen, acting as Chin Peng's representative while he was out of the country, came several times to the 10th Regiment to discuss the negotiations.

The first round of discussions took place on 2 and 3 February 1989 on Phuket Island. Before we set out, there was a party to wish us all the best for a successful meeting. Our delegation left along with a group from the party to the landing area for the Thai Army helicopter. From there we were flown to the meeting place in Phuket in south Thailand.

The CPM representatives who attended the conference were Chang Ling-Yun @ Ah Soo as chief negotiator, myself and Zainun. With me as one of our group was Indra Jaya Abdullah @ Anas from the CPM Secretariat. The Malaysian government was headed by Datuk Abdul Rahim Noor, Deputy Head of the Royal Malaysian Police at the time. He looked down upon us and even refused to shake my hand. I was too embarrassed to retract my hand, so I just kept it extended, and only then did he grasp my hand—with his fingers.

Some friction was bound to be part of such a meeting. However, on the first day, the chairman allowed the Malaysian government representative to speak first. So, Datuk Abdul Rahim Noor began first, and judging from what he said, it seemed like he was not interested in ways to end the armed conflict; instead we were attacked, and various accusations were hurled at us.

I seethed with anger when I heard the insults and accusations being recklessly directed at us. The three of us began to whisper among ourselves. Chang Ling-Yun suggested that we ask for a pause in proceedings so that we could prepare ourselves more carefully. Zainun and I agreed. When Rahim Noor stopped speaking, and it was our turn to respond to him, we asked the chairman's permission to continue the next morning. The chair, Major-General Kitti Rattanachaya gave us leave to go off and hold our own discussion. I firmly told my comrades that we could not allow them to simply attack us like this. We had to respond to their accusations. We too had a great deal of proof and facts in response. Zainun and Chang Ling-Yun agreed, and we prepared our strategy.

On the second day, when the meeting began, we noticed that Rahim Noor and his men were sitting nervously—we were sure that they had already guessed that we had prepared ourselves fully to reply. Chang Ling-Yun spoke in Chinese, because he couldn't speak in English; his speech was translated fluently into Malay. He revealed the dates, years, places and incidents where dirty tactics and terror had been used, instigated by the British colonial government. We explained that we had fought to the death to obtain independence from the British. In reality, we said, our contributions and our blood should be woven into the history of

our nation's independence. After this, no more accusations were made at us.

Major-General Kitti as the chair stressed that both sides should really not be trading accusations, but should be looking for a way to achieve the desired goal. To achieve success it was not necessary to replay all the bitter episodes during the armed conflict which had taken place over half a century. If all was to be disclosed by both sides, a month would not suffice. What had happened, had happened, there was no need now to go over all this. Starting from that moment, he said, we should be thinking about how to settle this decades-old conflict. We were made to understand that both sides held the same desire, that is, to end the war and bring about peace. So we had to turn our energies to this direction.

Hearing his speech, I felt happier and calmer; it seemed as though the chairman was slightly on our side. Rahim Noor agreed with Major-General Kitti Rattanchaya's advice. Our spokesperson Chang Ling-Yun also agreed.

After the first round ended, we were taken back by Thai army troops to our respective camps. Indra Jaya and I were given a rousing welcome by our comrades, beginning at the helicopter landing site, then in front of the camp. At night, they held a packed celebration with a varied agenda including a cultural show.

The third round of talks was held on 11 to 13 May 1989 in Phuket. Unfortunately, Chang Ling-Yun could not attend because he had fallen ill. He was replaced by Wu Yi Shek from the 12th MNLA Regiment. Not long after, we received a telegram telling us that Chang Ling-Yun had passed away.

The negotiations restarted in five stages. On the first day, things

were fairly dull. But from then on the discussion went smoothly with everyone trying to solve various problems together. There were three major issues which were a sticking point between the representatives of the Malaysian government and the CPM.

The first was regarding the surrender. We said that it was impossible, unreasonable and unfair. The Baling talks had failed because the Tunku demanded this condition. The second issue concerned arms. The Malaysian government wanted us to lay down our weapons and destroy all our arms. The third sticking point was to do with the recognition of the CPM. Rahim Noor didn't want to compromise on the issue of the party, CPM had to be banned. The same thing went for our troops. I asked permission to speak; if I didn't air my feelings, they would fester in my heart. I asked everyone to excuse me, because I had a few words to say. If burden of the three issues were laid solely on the CPM, it would be akin to the old Malay proverb about a hen and a rooster—the hen gets her head pecked, wings trampled, and rear poked. This was what our party was being asked to bear.

Zainun laughed, Rahim too guffawed heartily. It seemed that he understood my caustic parallel. We had fought for decades, and here was a chance for peace, but he was acting like a king. It was not right that a deputy police chief could lord it over everything. For me, our contribution to resisting the Japanese Occupation and the British did not need to be valued. But there was no need either to see us as low, dishonourable people either. For those of us from the CPM/MNLA (which had changed its name to the Malayan People's Army), surrender was the most degrading thing, we did not even want a partial surrender. We regarded ourselves as ordinary folk, Malaysian citizens who had political

rights and had fought a bloody battle against the colonial power. The post-Independence conflict was a legacy of the British, so here we were trying to end the fighting together.

In the end, we did agree to disband all our armed units and destroy our weapons. In return, our peace and safety was to be guaranteed. This problem was overcome when the Thais agreed to help provide this assurance. Because of this, the issue of surrendering ourselves did not arise again. Yes, the CPM was banned and we agreed to disband the party. In return, we were allowed to set up a new party and move freely and openly in Malaysia. The Malaysian representatives agreed with this. A socialist party could be registered in Malaysia to replace CPM. Thus, our dignity and reputation were preserved.

In the fifth and final round, Chin Peng attended as the CPM Secretary-General. Two agreements, that between the Malaysian government and CPM and the one between the Royal Thai Government and CPM, were passed.

On 2 December 1989, a ceremony to mark the signing of the peace agreement between the three parties was held at Hotel Lee Gardens in Haadyai, Southern Thailand. For CPM, the signatories were Chin Peng @ Ong Boon Hua as Secretary-General, Abdullah C. D. as CPM Chairman and myself as a member of the Central Committee. There were also comrades who also attended as honoured guests: Wu Yi Shek, Zainun and Suriani Abdullah @ Eng Ming Ching. Huang Seng and Indra Jaya were present as well.

The Peace Agreement was a huge and historic event for Malaysia and Thailand. It meant the end of the armed insurrection which had taken up almost 40 years. It was the end of the legacy

of the British colonial strategy to obstruct the nation's progress. This was what had been hoped for by nation and people, including our side.

Be that as it may, the British strategy to hinder our progress did not quite disappear. One element of this was the Internal Security Act, which was initially enacted to vanquish the armed struggle. Today, although our nation is at peace, the ISA still continues to curtail the democratic rights of the people. Many progressive, far-sighted individuals, upholders of justice and truth, have become victims of this act.

After the signing, all three parties made good their promises. However, something arose which went against the spirit of the agreement. The first contingent of ex-soldiers returning to Malaysia in August 1991 faced all kinds of bureaucratic whims when trying to comply with the conditions of the Peace Accord. Because of this, the scheduled return of the ex-soldiers to the motherland was postponed by about six months.

In that time, the Thai government had fulfilled its part of the agreement well. Today, there are four peace villages for ex-CPM soldiers in southern Thailand and there are plans to further develop them. I settled in Chulabhorn 11, that is, Ban Chulabhorn Patana 11 in Yala Province, southern Thailand, made up of 60 families. A beautiful little mosque was built, where I also teach the Qu'ran to the village children every day.

23

Visiting My Village and the Holy Land

It was not that I didn't have deep feelings about wanting to go home and live in the country I'd spilt my blood for, Malaysia. The problem was that the ISA had not been abolished.

We had discussed this matter during the Phuket talks, but there was no resolution, it had just been left hanging. So that we were not disheartened, we were told that we could raise the issue again, if not in a year, then two years later; if it still wasn't resolved, we could discuss this in ten years. So, we understood that the ISA was never going to be lifted, let alone abolished. The result was that as long as the ISA existed, it could be thrown at anyone who was wanted by those in power. If I returned and remained resident in Malaysia, the reality was that I would be a constant police target unless attitudes towards us changed, and our human rights and safety would be guaranteed and we would not be caught, detained, investigated under ISA or mistreated.

Thus we were forced to remain in several villages in southern Thailand. Another reason was because of our treatment by the Thai government. In contrast with the Malaysians, the Thais took more care of us. The Malaysians were cool towards our welfare and lives.

The Thai government gave each family a piece of land of 15 rai, as well as a house. All amenities such as the water supply and

electricity were included and the costs borne by them. They have given us other forms of assistance until today. A few days ago, for example, I was sent twelve hens. Every three or four months, we are given hens to raise. In each village, twenty persons will receive them, then the next time, another twenty would have their turn, and so on. So, at any one time, no less than 400 hens are sent.

The government also sends us seedlings, fertilizers, weed-killer as well as pesticides. They even send agricultural extension workers to advise us on how to run our gardens and farms.

CPM has totally ceased all its activities and does not hold any meetings, collect fees or other things. The Central Committee has played only two roles. The first was to pioneer the villages and then organize them. Setting up the villages needed spirit and leadership from us as leaders. Afterwards, when the houses were all built and equipped sufficiently and the land was agreed upon, we had to help organize the village community. It wasn't easy to go from carrying weapons to carrying hoes. All of our weapons have long been incinerated and destroyed; they were replaced by hoes and other agricultural tools. Such drastic social change needed our leadership.

Second, the Central Committee was responsible for looking after the welfare of all veterans who were wounded or handicapped. Some had broken legs, others were blinded in battle or had other injuries. We have looked after them—till today they are given 540 baht each month. It was a good thing that long ago, Chin Peng had planned and was ready for this. So, we still can help those of us who have been less fortunate. God willing, our resources will be able to hold out for a long while yet.

It was rare that the CPM Central Committee has a chance to meet. We no longer gather and discuss things. If there are any new developments, people meet one on one just to exchange ideas. Usually, we just get on with our individual lives. Chin Peng is rarely here; he is often in Bangkok or Haadyai and sometimes overseas.

The question of my return and residence was a matter of principle and a big problem. It was a principle I held on to firmly, and not because Chin Peng prevented me from going to Malaysia to live. But we were all aware that if we returned with the ISA still in force, we would be putting aside our dignity as free and independent men and women.

We did visit Malaysia and see our relatives. First, I returned to my village in Gunung Mesah, Gopeng. It was more than 40 years ago that I left my village. I remembered where I had fallen, and where I had played. I was now old, with many grandchildren, even great-grandchildren. My children said to me, “Your youth is over, father, its better if you come and live in Malaysia, why do you stay on in another country? We will look after you father”.

I explained to them as clearly as possible,

I can come back and visit, but to remain here—don’t think about it, there’s little hope. The official position of the Malaysian authorities towards us doesn’t look like it has changed, what more they hold the sword of the ISA over our heads. I am not going to sell my name or surrender just to come and live in Malaysia. If I live in Malaysia, for four or five months things would be exciting, after this we’d just become old folk, and no one would pay us any attention—see what happened to Shamsiah Fakhir and her husband, who are living in a state of

hardship, with no one paying any heed. In our village in southern Thailand, we still have our people who feel responsible for my health and welfare.

This was what I explained at length to my children. After this, some of them were still not happy, but they respected and supported my thoughts and wishes.

I also wished to travel and see Malaysia, especially Penang. It had been so long since we had left our own country, so if we did not go anywhere it would be a shame. I had two Special Branch policemen guarding me, so I asked them, “If I go to Penang for a visit, can we go together?” They replied happily and quickly, “Oh, if you’d like to, we are ready”.

Although I thought to myself that I would be safe because of the two policemen escorting me, I felt a bit apprehensive. Perhaps in the middle of our journey something would happen that I didn’t want. Perhaps there was someone who would play “*kong kali kong*” and torment me. So I wondered—to go, or not to go? My feelings were running riot, so I forced myself to be strong and take the risk.

A few days later, I was taken to Kuala Lumpur by my brother Yusof Maidin. He was working for Datuk Seri Megat Joned, who was at the time Deputy Minister for the Interior. We met Megat Joned at his office in Bukit Aman. In the middle of our meeting and chat, Tan Sri Norian Mai, the Deputy Chief of the Malaysian Police walked in. “Pak Rashid, Pak Rashid!” He called out to me affectionately. “Is there anything wrong?” I asked. It seemed like he was trying to joke with me about something which I was sensitive about. We started laughing. I joked with him in turn, “Why is Rahim Noor so arrogant, like a gangster?” Norian Mai answered briefly to stop my joking, “Oh that’s the way he is”.

After I'd chatted a bit more with Megat Joned, he offered to sponsor my pilgrimage to Mecca. I didn't accept his offer straight away, saying that I needed two or three days to make a decision. I wondered: was this offer a way of buying me, to make me give up my principles or lose my self-respect? What if I started to compromise with the views I had held for so long; I'd be a coward. Performing the hajj, this too would add to the gossip—the haji has surrendered, the haji is a coward, and goodness knows what else. If I were to perform the pilgrimage, I wanted to do so in a way that was above board, a hajj accepted by God.

Megat Joned took me to meet Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the Prime Minister's Department. Dr Mahathir didn't say much, but I respected him. At the very least, I thought, he had an anti-imperialist spirit. If compared with the previous prime ministers of Malaysia—Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn—Dr Mahathir was a long way ahead. He had changed the face of Malaysia, economically within the country as well as externally. In short, he had wrought fundamental changes to the Malaysian economy to make it more prosperous. It no longer depended on tin mining, which resulted in barren sandy wasteland, while the profits went to British mining companies. No longer was it tied to the rubber industry, whose profits rose and fell and were hard to forecast because the price was determined by dealers at the Rubber Exchange in London. When I met Dr Mahathir, this was the topic of his narrative, his great anger towards the white people who were still greedy.

Although I had been living in remote jungles, from afar I would receive news of Malaysia and make comparisons between this and that. In fact, even at the border we appreciated the development of the nation. In particular, the building of Penang

bridge in 1981 represented one project which was positive and good for the people. Now they wanted to build another one; one was not enough because there were always traffic jams. Look, there were prime ministers before him who didn't think about or take the trouble to build a bridge. Now, Dr Mahathir had had a bridge built. It represented a great improvement and a huge change.

We had wanted for a long time to stop being enemies, but were regarded as foes all the same, what could we have done? The only way to stop the enmity was dialogue. But if we did not have a chance to meet, what were we to do? We too felt that it was a shame that the development of our economy had for decades been set back because of our armed conflict. A vast area of jungle could not be entered, and nothing could be done there whatsoever because it was riddled with our land mines. In fact, they thought there were mines even where there were none. If we had not planted land mines, we would have been easily hunted down. What were we to do? Ahead lay mistakes, and behind us too lay mistakes. So we were forced to defend what dignity we had after fighting the Japanese violation of our country.

Returning to the hajj, after one or two months, Megat Joned as Deputy Interior Minister was replaced by Tajol Rosli Ghazali. During his time, I went to Malaysia once more. So I asked Megat what Tajol was like. Megat gave me an official letter allowing me to go and perform the hajj. I was greeted by Tajol, "Nothing has changed, all is as was promised by Megat Joned".

I accepted their offer. Since 1941, I had been involved in the CPM. Yet, my belief in Islam had never left me. So here was a chance to go to Mecca, it was a blessing, a religious duty I didn't dream of being able to fulfill while I was a guerrilla in the jungles. My wife was a convert and she too would now have a chance to accompany me to Mecca and perform the hajj. I hoped that she would further deepen her faith in God.

Abdullah C. D. was also going to perform the hajj with his wife, but they left via Bangkok. He had pledged Sheikh Haji in Sungai Golok that he would go. Abu Samah Mohd Kassim also went to Mecca with Abdullah C. D. As planned, I departed from Kuala Lumpur. My Sheikh Haji was Megat Joned, who was replaced by Tajol Rosli Ghazali. Abdullah C. D. and others had also received an offer from Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Othman via Tabung Haji, but because of unclear communication, they went with Sheikh Haji from Golok. Blessed was it to be in front of God, I was able to complete my obligatory hajj in peace.

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