

# Cherishing our hard-won peace, 33 years after the end of communist insurgency

By [Raymond Goh](#) - November 27, 2022 @ 9:45am



Surviving veterans at the National Monument (Tugu Negara). The writer is first from right.

DURING the Malayan Campaign in World War 2 from 1941 to 1945, the Japanese army attacked and occupied Malaya. In response, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) rose and fought alongside the British colonialists against the Japanese forces.

After Japan surrendered on Aug 15, 1945, the MPAJA and communist pro-independence fighters of the Malayan National Liberation Army, comprising about 5,000 men, turned against their British masters who returned to administer Malaya and extract her rich resources of tin and rubber.

The guerillas organised themselves into the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), claiming to fight for the independence of Malaya so that the rich resources like tin and rubber could be retained to develop the country.

As a result, the British administration declared the Malayan Emergency when the communists came on their bicycles and fatally shot three planters in their office at a rubber plantation in Sungai Siput, Perak, on Aug 16, 1948. The fourth planter escaped death because his arrival was delayed when his vehicle broke down.

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With the independence of Malaya won in London under our first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman on Aug 31, 1957, the MCP lost its rationale as a war of colonial liberation against the British administration of Malaya.

The Emergency ended when the last significant group of MCP insurgents surrendered in Teluk Anson, Perak, in 1958. However, some communists did not give up and fled northwards to the Thai border. As no major MCP activities were detected in Malaya, and seeing that peace had returned, Tunku Abdul Rahman declared the end of the Emergency on July 31, 1960.

INSURGENCY RENEWED

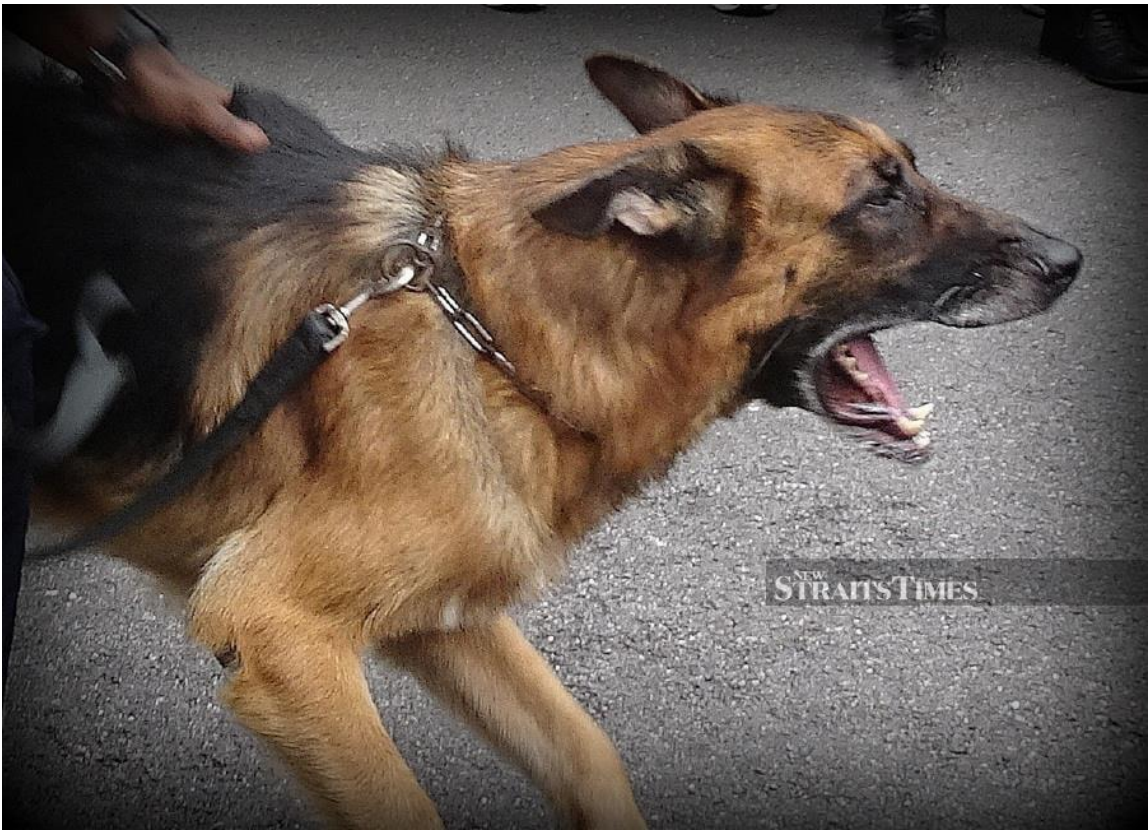


Preparing for a patrol along the East-West Highway.

However, after reconsolidating their ranks and reorganising themselves along the Thai border, MCP secretary-general Chin Peng and his followers renewed the insurgency against the Malaysian government, declaring its return to armed revolt in 1968 to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the Malayan Emergency.

The Indonesian Confrontation (1963) had hardly ended on Aug 11, 1966, when the second Emergency erupted.

This time, instead of British colonialists, the communists had declared armed revolt against the sovereignty and democracy of Malaysia, which lasted up to 1989. Just after the second Emergency officially began on June 17, 1968, our security forces at the Kroh-Betong road in northern Perak was ambushed by insurgents.



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Tracker dogs were also deployed to track down enemies.

The build-up to the second Emergency could probably be attributed to regional events in that period. After World War 2, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia fell under communist influence while trying to gain independence from France, which returned to reclaim its Indochina colonies in 1946.

The French return to Vietnam was immediately met with resistance from the Viet Minh. Just after six months from November 1953, the Vietnamese, with four infantry divisions of 49,000 troops and supported by a 100 artillery guns, defeated a French garrison of 12,000 troops in the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu (northwest Vietnam) on May 7, 1954. The French garrison commander surrendered to prevent further loss of lives.



The 600-metre rifle range built by army engineers in Bukit Merbau, Kelantan.

On July 21, 1954, at the Geneva Convention, the communists were allowed to establish a government in North Vietnam with jurisdiction until the 17th parallel (the provisional military demarcation line established in Vietnam by the Geneva Accords in 1954) as instructed by then China premier Zhou Enlai after negotiations with French prime minister Pierre Mendes, who agreed to pull French forces out of Vietnam.

South Vietnam remained a democracy with the help of American forces. This was to prevent the "Domino Theory" of southeast Asian countries falling into communist hands as propounded and expounded by US president Dwight D. Eisenhower.

However, on April 30, 1975, the North Vietnamese overcame the mighty American forces via left-flanking guerilla attacks through Laos and Cambodia, and united Vietnam.

This gave encouragement to the MCP, whose members and leadership were inspired by the success of the Vietnamese forces. The resurgence of the MCP insurgency was also strongly supported by China, which wanted to spread its ideology.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATION

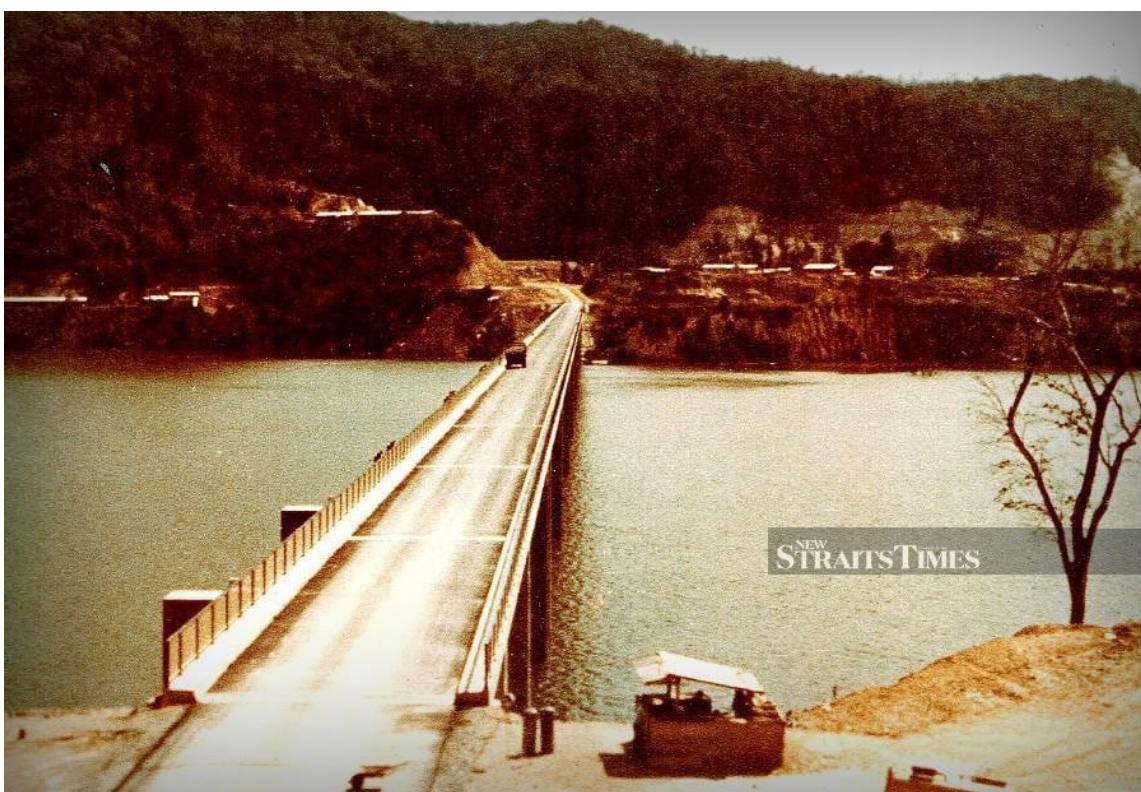




The writer at the tactical HQ in Jeli camp of the East-West Highway.

After my command of the Royal Engineers School in Kluang in 1985, I was given command of the Royal Engineer Regiment in 4 Infantry Division in Kuantan, Pahang, under General Officer Commanding Major-General Datuk Osman Zain.

My area of operations covered Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. As a brainchild of prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, the "Security and Development" concept of operations was introduced to win the hearts and minds of the people. This marked the birth of the five-year Malaysia Plans since 1966. This was the people's war and it became known as psychological operations.



The Banding bridge.

The 127km East-West Highway connecting Jeli in Kelantan to Grik in Perak was the biggest project by the Public Works Department in 1970. It had the longest bridges connecting Pulau Banding (880m on the west



side and 640 metres on the east side) in Temenggor lake. Security was provided by our army along the highway.



Artillery guns at East-West Highway to provide harassing fire at enemy locations.

The purpose of this highway was to prevent communist forces from infiltrating the peninsula from their sanctuaries at the Thai border. Our artillery guns were posted at various high points along the highway to provide harassing fire and bombardment of enemy locations gathered through our military intelligence.

Other major projects included the Temenggor dam, Pedu dam and Muda dam for power generation, agricultural irrigation and water supply to Kedah and Penang.

For civic action projects, our army engineers built the 36km road from Merapoh to Gunung Tahan National Park, a 6km road at Kampung Pek (Kelantan) and a house for Puan Zalimah (a young widow with two children whose old house was washed away by heavy floods in December 1986), which was sponsored by the Kota Baru Council. We also constructed the 600m rifle range at Bukit Merbau (Kelantan) for our troops in the event of counter-insurgency warfare.



Brigadier General Datuk Chong Thean Bok, Commander of 4 Infantry Brigade.

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In support of the 4 Infantry Brigade, we provided combat engineers for counter-insurgency operations at hotspots in the Pahang-Perak border under the command of master tactician Brigadier-General Datuk Chong Thean Bok.

Meanwhile, our mission was to pursue Chong Chor, the chief of the MCP's 6th Assault Unit, and destroy his communist infrastructure, especially the food and ammunition dumps. Subsequently, Chong Chor was captured on March 2, 1988.

**END OF HOSTILITIES**



Headquarters 4 Infantry Division Group in August 1986.

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In an unprecedented historic event on May 29, 1974, prime minister Razak, in good faith, made a goodwill visit to Mao Tse-tung, chairman of the People's Republic of China, as the first leader of an Asean country to forge peace with China in spite of the country's communist ideology.

Since then, Malaysia and China have established good diplomatic relations and increased trade with each other. Following China's open foreign policy in December 1978, president Deng Xiao Peng was instrumental in urging the MCP to seek peace with the Malaysian government in 1980.

China's support for MCP was then withdrawn. After 21½ years, the communist insurgency came to an end when the MCP agreed to lay down its arms. A peace deal was brokered over many months in 1989 by the Thai authorities in collaboration with our government.





Troops on standby for counter-insurgency operations.

On Dec 2, 1989, the peace treaty was signed between Malaysia and the MCP in Hat Yai, Southern Thailand.

Malaysia was represented by Armed Forces chief General Tan Sri Mohamad Hashim Mohd Ali and inspector-general of police Tan Sri Mohammed Hanif Omar, together with Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Wan Sidek Wan Abdul Rahman.

The MCP delegation was led by Chin Peng, Abdullah C.D. (chairman) and Rashid Maidin (central committee member).

After 40 years, five months and 25 days from the beginning of the First Malayan Emergency on June 16, 1948, the communist insurgency in Malaysia finally came to an end on Dec 2, 1989.

As time passed by, we may have forgotten the fact that our nation had actually experienced armed conflicts over four decades (1948-1989) — the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960, the Indonesian Confrontation from 1963 to 1966, and the second Emergency from 1968 to 1989.

May our nation remember and salute the thousands of fallen heroes and surviving veterans of our security forces. As a result, we've been able to enjoy three decades (1989-2022) of peace and prosperity.

May our younger generation appreciate these blessings of peace and freedom, even as the older generation have passed on to glory land. May the Almighty God bless our country with everlasting peace and prosperity for our posterity. Amen (So be it).

*Ingenieur Lieutenant-Colonel (r) Raymond Goh Boon Pah KMN (Royal Engineers Veteran) is a graduate civil engineer from University of Malaya and combat engineer from College of Military Engineering in Pune, India. He's also a graduate in Defence Studies from the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College and is a post-graduate in Defence Technology from the Royal Military College of Science in Shrivenham, England.*