

Colours of a nation

Human stories which reflect the symbolism of the colours of our Jalur Gemilang have **Aneeta Sundararaj** enthralled at a photographic exhibition in the Islamic Arts Museum

IF you had to define what makes Malaysia a nation, what would you do and say? Such was the dilemma Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria, 36, curator at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, faced as she pondered on creating an exhibition to commemorate our 55th Merdeka and 49th Malaysia Day celebrations.

Ros started by coming to grips with the fact that as a nation state, Malaysia's sovereignty geographically coincides with its boundaries. Also, the characteristics of the state (a defined territory, self-rule, an organised government and people who share a national identity or customs) are instruments of economic, social, cultural and national unity. The next challenge was to illustrate this definition in a manner accessible to the public.

The result is a photographic exhibition

called Formation Of A Nation: A Photographic Flashback. On display will be 55 selected black and white photographs from the National Archives.

These photos not only depict memorable moments in the formation of the country as a nation, but also highlight the importance of historical documentation in our nation's history. A 132-page catalogue was created to accompany the exhibition.

Instead of taking the easy way out and displaying these photos in chronological order, Ros employed a unique approach. The exhibition divides the photographic collection into six main sections based on the symbolism of the colours and design of our national flag, Jalur Gemilang. The catalogue mirrors this, but has one addition: Before each section in the catalogue, there is a quote from our prime ministers, past and present.

Why the national flag? Simply put, Ros says: "I believe our flag can give you all necessary information about Malaysia."

In the next moment, she asks: "Do you know what colour was originally missing from our flag?"

It transpires that, prior to Independence, the design chosen for the new flag for the Federation of

Malaya was made up of stripes, the crescent and star and appeared only in red, white and blue. It was the Sultan of Kedah, Tuanku Badlishah ibni Al-marhum Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (father of the present Yang di-Pertuan Agong) who pointed out what was missing during the 9th meeting of the Conference of Rulers. He said: "I think the Rulers consider

Sultan Abdul Samad building from a different angle



The Sultan of Selangor welcoming Queen Elizabeth

yellow to be Royal. All colours are represented here except yellow." This is how the crescent and star on the Jalur Gemilang is now in yellow.

To reaffirm the importance of royalty, the first section in the exhibition is titled Yellow. Of the many photos there, Ros has highlighted two. One is of the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Abdul Rahman

ibni Almarhum Tuanku Muhammad. The second, taken in 1972, is of Sultan Saiahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, the Sultan of Selangor, welcoming Queen Elizabeth II, the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Anne to

the Aiam Shah Palace.

"Red, I think," says Ros, "signifies courage. This is not only courage to defend the country, but also the courage of the people to change their way of life from an agricultural-based one to an industrial-based one."

One photograph shows a soldier bidding farewell to his family at the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station. He is going to Congo for the Federation of Malaysia's first world security mission. "I like the woman in the foreground most of all," says Ros. "Look at her facial expression. She is trying so hard to be brave, but you can see she's also scared that she might never see her husband again."

Ros then highlights a recent comment made by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon who said that Malaysians should be proud of what their armed forces have achieved. From 1960 to 2012, Malaysia has participated in seven UN peacekeeping missions.

Blue denotes Unity In Diversity. For Ros, nothing says this more than a photo taken in 1963 which shows a group of people cheering Tunku Abdul Rahman and his

friends upon their return from London at the Sungai Besi airport after successfully negotiating for the formation of Malaysia.

Another touching photo is of a group of Peranakan women whose attire and customs have elements of both Chinese and Malay cultures. Seeing this, Ros tells a personal story: "In 1957, I wasn't born yet. My parents weren't even married. My mother was from the kampung. It's really rural. She said she was aware of something going on, but didn't know what. What she does remember is that she would go to a house in a nearby kampung, Klebang Besar and it was Tan Cheng Lok's house.



Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria



A soldier bidding farewell to his family



A group of Peranakan women

What Formation Of A Nation: A Photographic Flashback
Where Special Gallery 1, Islamic Arts Museum, Jalan Lembah Perdana, Kuala Lumpur
When Aug 29 to Nov 29 daily, 10am to 6pm.
Website www.iamm.org.my



The Yang di-Pertuan Agong performing the Hajj



Catholic nun leading a group of orphans

She remembers listening to him speak. Must have been a ceramah, I suppose." She adds with a sigh, "It was very multi-racial then."

Moving on, the White section in the exhibition displays photographs showing the Pursuit Of Goodwill and Sincerity And Integrity.

These, Ros insist, "apply to each person as an individual, as a member of society and as a citizen of Malaysia." One photograph, taken in 1970, is of a ranger donating blood at the General Hospital Blood Centre in Kuala Lumpur. Another is of a Catholic nun leading a group of orphans in a convent.

Stripes corresponds with the 13 States and Federal Territories. A particularly interesting illustration here is the 1953 photograph of the Sultan Abdul Samad building. Although the facade of the front of this building has been photographed multiple times, this photo shows another rarely seen side.

Lastly, Crescent, of course, symbolises Islam and there are three photographs that Ros is fond of.

First there is a photo taken in 1974 of the present Yang di-Pertuan Agong (when he was then the 5th Yang di-Pertuan Agong then) performing the Hajj.

Then, there is one of Masjid Zahir in Alor Setar. The last is one taken in 1963 of the third Yang Di-Pertuan Agong addressing the people before Hari Raya prayers at the gardens of Istana Negara. "I like this very much.

THE A-LIST BY JOHN TIONG

GORGEOUS WEAVES

Where: Shalini Ganendra Fine Art@ Gallery Residence
8 Lorong 16/7B, Section 16 Petaling Jaya

When: Oct 3 - Nov 15

Admission: Free

Call: 03-7960 4740

CAROL Cassidy's woven textiles bear influences from Norway, Finland, South Africa and Laos. The latter is the country which most influenced her art. Cassidy goes to the extent of labelling Laos as "a weaver's paradise".

Enas, Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Datuk Chuah Thean Teng and Zulkifli Yusoff.

ALISM

Where: Core Design Gallery, 87 Jalan SS15/2A, Subang Jaya, Selangor

When: Till Sept 1

Admission: Free

Call: 012-611 7976

THE third solo showcase by artist Ali Nurazmal.

SILENT MONSOON

Where: Wei-Ling Contemporary, G212 Ground Floor, The Gardens Mall, KL

When: Till Sept 4

Admission: Free

Call: 03-2282 8323

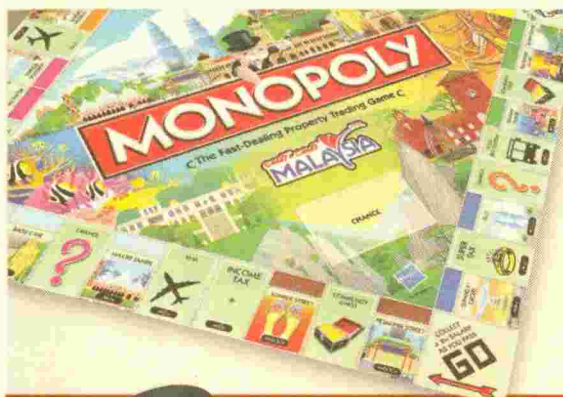


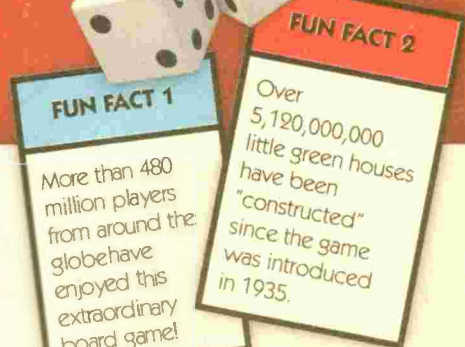
CHEN Wei Meng, who grew up in Terengganu, weaves his childhood experiences of the monsoon into his paintings.

chunghoo@nstp.com.my

At the time, Masjid Negara wasn't open yet and it's nice to see how the King allowed people to come to the palace grounds and he prayed with them," says Ros.

Many times, the history of a nation is described in formal terms where people are presented with indigest-

ible data and shown standard photographs. This exhibition, depicted through a set of unique photographs, show the country and its people in a different and, possibly, truer light. No doubt, we will leave this exhibition feeling proud of the journey we have taken together thus far.

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25 Aug'12 (Sat)	11am-2pm	Isetan KLOCC	4pm- 7pm	Toys 'R' Us KLOCC
26 Aug'12 (Sun)	11am-2pm	Toys 'R' Us 1 Utama	4pm-7pm	Parkson 1 Utama
31 Aug'12 (Fri)	11am-2pm	Parkson Pavilion	4.30pm- 7.30pm	Parkson KLOCC
1 Sep'12 (Sat)	11am-2pm	Toys 'R' Us Empire Shopping Gallery	4.30pm- 7.30pm	Parkson Sunway Pyramid

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