The History and Design Chronology of

JALUR GEMILANG
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Make Condition Design is a creative thinktank involved in many pursuits in the name of transformation of Malaysia through design. We are a non-governmental organization started in 2007. We are committed to the betterment of the creative and design industry, its peoples, and Malaysia. Our mission is to transform the creative and design industry with the intention to impact our nation’s GDP. Make Condition Design’s vision is to empower humanity’s progression through recognizing future cultural possibilities.

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Jalur Gemilang hoisted in the Merdeka Celebration at KLCC, 2008
Photo by Pixo Square Production
Prologue

*Long before there was corporate branding, there was nation building.*

It’s truly a rare opportunity for a national flag to be deconstructed from designers’ perspective. The discovery of how it began, the design process, and finally how decisions were made was perhaps one of the most exciting points to this research.

As we explored how national identity was made at the very beginning of its formation, we experienced its great historical events at the beginning of building a nation. We felt it was necessary to dive into the unfamiliar territory, in trying to understand the notion of nation building pre-independence and its gravity.

The intention for this report was with the best interest of exploring and understanding the construction of the identity for Malaysia.

We would like to extend our gratitude to Arkib Negara and those that have greatly contribute to the development of this report by enriching our understanding on the perspective of building the nation through design.
MALAY NATIONAL FLAG

Leave out the kites and the letter from the flag.

WHITE

Our Crest

Insert the Kebis and Phoenix and note in the Crest

We are not prepared to give any views on this question until the fundamental issue about the nature of the arrangements is satisfactorily considered and settled. We have many suggestions to offer on this matter. (We do not agree with the terms in the "Official Statement"). But for the present these cannot be given until that point is settled to our satisfaction.
The beginning of the formation of the Federation of Malaya flag was through an agreement between the Royal Council whereby a committee was set up in 1949 to consider and select the design that was to represent the Federation of Malaya flag.

A major competition on a national scale was launched to select the rightful flag to represent the newly formed Federation of Malaya. The Federation Legislation Council organized the competition in 1949. A report was prepared by the committee and submitted to Federal Legislative Council on 15th November 1949. From 373 types of flag design, only 3 was chosen. The 3 chosen flags, with 6 different options of design were presented to the Raja-Raja Melayu to be selected.

The first design was an image of a double crossed keris icon at the center, surrounded by 11 five-pointed stars. The second was almost similar except the stars were arranged in two circles, surrounding the double crossed keris. The final design was an 11 striped blue-white with a star and crescent in yellow on the left.

The Federation Legislation Council invited the public to give their opinions about the 3 final designs. A local newspaper, The Malay Mail, organized the public opinion poll. The results were published on the 28th November 1949, and based upon the majority votes; the winner was the design of the third flag. The flag was submitted by a government architect from Johor by the name Mohamad bin Hamzah.
The Committee was very much involved in the decision making process for the designs for the flag of the Federation of Malaya in 1949.

Committee to consider designs for the flag of the Federation of Malaya.

Minutes of a meeting held at 12 noon on 2nd August, 1949, in the Committee Room, Council Chamber, Kuala Lumpur.

PRESENT:

The Honourable the Chief Secretary (Sir Alec Newboul, K.B.E., C.M.G., M.C., E.D., M.C.S.) (Chairman)

the Mentri Besar, Pahang (Dato Mahmud bin Mat, O.B.E., M.C.S.)

the Mentri Besar, Negri Sembilan (Dato Abdul Malek bin Yusof, M.C.S.)

the Mentri Besar, Johore (Dato Onn bin Jaafar, D.K., D.F.M.J.)

the Resident Commissioner, Penang (Mr. A.V. Aston, M.C., M.C.S.)

Mr. Yong Shook Lin, J.P.

Che Zainal Abidin bin Haji Abas, M.C.S.

ABSENT:

His Highness Tengku Yaacob ibni Sultan Abdul Hamid, C.M.G.

The Honourable Mr. H.H. Faser, M.B.E.

1. The Chairman opens the meeting by reading the terms of reference of the Committee as follows:

(i) To consider designs already submitted and any designs which may be submitted to the Committee;

(ii) To invite, if the Committee so desires, suggestions from the public;

(iii) To make a selection to be recommended for adoption and approval by the Conference of Rulers and Federal Legislative Council.
The design of the flag was amended and received the nod from the Royal Council on the 22nd and 23rd of February 1950. On the 19th April 1950, the Royal Council has passed the motion presented by the Chief State Secretary, as presented below;

“That in the opinion of this Council, the Flag of the Federation of Malaya should be as follows:-

Eleven horizontal stripes alternately red and white in colour, the uppermost stripe being red, having a blue quarter with a crescent and eleven-pointed star in yellow superimposed, the standard size of the flag to be six feet by three feet.”

The design of the flag had been given the permission by King George VI on 19th May 1950. It was the first time Federation of Malaya flag was raised in an official procession, which was organized by the British High Commission on the 26th May 1950, within the confines of the Sultan Selangor’s palace that was attended by the D.Y.M.M Raja-Raja Melayu and the royal officers of King George VI.
Dato Onn says that the crown represents the two Settlements and the nine stars the nine States and in his opinion the crown gives the design balance, but it could be replaced by two stars.

Dato Abdul Kalek suggests that the Arms of the Federation should be decided first and the Arms incorporated in the flag. It is pointed out that there are objection to this on practical grounds as the cost of such a flag would be prohibitive.

Dato Mahmud suggests that the six colours which are in the State flags should appear in the corner of the Federation flag.

The Chairman says in his opinion a flag should not be just a collection of colours, but it should be possible to argue the significance of the flag.

Dato Onn agrees and says that the flag should denote the birth of a new nation and should indicate the unity of the nine States and the two Settlements and partnership with the United Kingdom. The colours in the State flags are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Flags</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After discussion the Committee agrees that the colours in the Federation flag should be limited to White, Red, Yellow and Blue which predominate in the State flags.
(b) Symbols.

The Committee agrees that a symbol such as a kris, tiger or crescent may be included. Enche Zainal Abidin points out however that the representation of an animal may not be liked by Kampong Malays.

Mr. Yong Thock Lin thinks that the Chinese community would have no objection to the incorporation of a kris but says that the incorporation of any symbol will increase the cost of manufacture.

2. Press Release

The Committee agrees to the release of a press announcement on the following lines:

"Designs are invited for a flag for the Federation of Malaya. The design should be as simple as possible and should be restricted to the colours, yellow, red, white and blue. A symbol such as a kris, crossed krises, a tiger or a crescent may be incorporated but the general design should be symbolic of the Federation and the unity of the nine States and two Settlements. Designs should be submitted to the Clerk of Council's, The Council Chamber, Kuala Lumpur and should be received in his office on or before 10th September, 1949.

The Designs will be considered by the following Committee which will make recommendations to Their Highnesses the Rulers and the Federal Legislative Council."
Federation To Have Its Own Flag

The Federation is to have its own flag and members of the public are invited to submit designs.

The specification for the design, states an official release, is that it must be simple and should keep to the colours of yellow, red, white and blue with the general design symbolic of the Federation and the unity of the nine States and the two Settlements.

Designers will have until September 10 to put forward their ideas, which may include as a kris, cross krises, a tiger or a crescent. They should be forwarded to the Clerk of the Council, Council Chamber, Kuala Lumpur.

The following committee will consider the design submitted:
The Chief Secretary, Sir Alec Newboult (chairman), the Mentris Besar of Pahang, Negri Sembilan, and Johore; His Highness Tengku Yacob Ibni Sultan Abdul Hamid and Enche Zainal bin Haji Abas, representing the Malay Members of the Legislative Council; The Resident Commissioner, Penang, Mr. A. V. Aston, representing the Settlements; Mr. H. H. Facer and Mr. Yong Shook Lin, representing unofficial members of the Legislative Council.

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A call for action article for people to submit their design for the new Federated Malay States official flag, 10 August 1949, The Malay Mail

Arkib Negara Malaysia
Top
3 selected out of 573 designs submitted by post, 15 November 1949, The Malay Mail.
Arkib Negara Malaysia

Left
3 selected out of 573 designs submitted by post, 16 November 1949, Utusan Melayu.
Arkib Negara Malaysia
• In the centre of a blue flag, two crossed red kris, surrounded by a circle of eleven white five pointed stars. (Crossed kris can be seen behind the anchor on the Malaysian naval ensign)

  – Explanation: Colours; red was found on six state/settlement flags, white on five, and blue on three, and all were colours of the Union Jack. Eleven stars of equal size, equally spaced, represented the states/settlements in no particular order, and each of equal importance. Kris was of great antiquity and peculiar to the Malayan archipelago, thus identifying the flag with Malaya.

• Similar to the first proposal, but with the stars arranged in two concentric circles, one of six stars, outside one of five stars.

  – Explanation: The same as first proposal, with the inner circle of stars representing the Unfederated Malay States and the outer circle the four Federated States and two Settlements.

• Six blue and five white horizontal stripes. A red canton half the length of the flag resting on top of the white stripe second from the bottom. A yellow five point star, oriented with one point in the six o’clock position, in the centre of the canton, and a yellow crescent, arranged like a C, between the star and the hoist.

  – Explanation: One stripe for each state or settlement. Yellow star and crescent represented sultanate monarchies of the states, and the religion of the states. The red field of the canton represented British protection and the complete red, white, blue associated the Federation with the Commonwealth.
Flag Debate

It is not now expected that the Councillors will be called on to pass final judgment on the report of the select committee to choose a Federal flag.

The Chief Secretary, Sir Alec Newboult, will ask again for the adjournment of the debate.

The question of the flag will be considered by the Rulers Conference at their meeting on Wednesday and Thursday.

Tomorrow’s meeting, the eight this year, takes place 11 days after the conclusion of the last meeting.

This is the first time that meetings of the council have been held so closely together. The last meeting, which was the budget meeting, lasted for three days.

The FLAG: FINAL CHOICE MONDAY

From Our Staff Correspondent
Kuala Lumpur, Wednesday.

FEDERAL Legislative Councillors at their meeting on Monday will be asked to make a final choice of a Federal flag. The Chief Secretary, Sir Alec Newboult, will move the adoption of the report of the committee set up to recommend a Federal flag.

Ten days ago the debate on the new Federal flag was adjourned.

The Council agenda, published today shows that the Civil Liability (Termination) Bill will be taken through the second reading, committee stage and third reading. Six other Bills, including the Undesirable Publications Bill, are down for third reading.

Dato Zainul Abidin, Secretary-General of U.M.N.O. will move a resolution that the teaching of the Malay and English languages should be compulsory in all Government and Government-aided primary schools.
Mohamed Bin Hamzah was responsible in submitting the design of the earlier Federation flag. The government architect, as telegraphed above submitted 4 designs, and managed to be selected out of 373 submissions.
Left
A sketch submitted by Mohamad bin Hamzah.
Arkib Negara Malaysia

Facing Page
The portrait of Mohamed bin Hamzah and his official letter of submission addressed to the Clerk of Councils dated 13 August 1949.
Arkib Negara Malaysia
The design of the Federation of Malaya flag which has been finally chosen and will be submitted for approval by the Legislative Council on April 19. The design has 11 horizontal stripes alternately red and white, with a blue quarter containing a crescent and an 11-pointed star in yellow.
The Officiation of the Flag

On 19th April 1950, with advice from the Federal Legislative Council and upon the agreement from the Royal Federation of Malaya, the Malaysian flag was chosen to represent the Federated Malaya. Originally, crescent and star were in white, however with the advice from Sultan of Kedah, along with remaining Rulers’, the white is to be replaced with the yellow, to symbolically represent Royal sovereign.

It was the first time Federation of Malaya flag was raised in an official procession, which was organized by the British High Commission on the 26th May 1950, within the confines of the Sultan Selangor’s palace that was attended by the D.Y.M.M Raja-Raja Melayu and the royal officers of King George VI.

At 9:38 am, the Federation of Malaya flag was raised by Sir Henry Gurney (British High Commissioner in Malaya) on behalf of statesmen. It was from that moment, Federation of Malaya had its very own flag, proudly stood for a new country that is united.
Proposed Federation Of Malaya Flag

The proposed flag for the Federation of Malaya. A motion to adopt the design will be submitted at the next meeting of the Federal Legislature.
The flag was 6 feet wide and 3 feet height with six stripes in red and 5 stripes of white. These 11 stripes represent the unity between 11 federated states that is Johor, Pahang, Selangor, Perak, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu and Pulau Pinang.

The colours of red, white and blue represents that Malaysia is a Commonwealth country. The crescent and star represents Islam as the official religion for the Federation of Malaya as the yellow symbolizes royal sovereignty and also as Islamic leader for the country. Unity and co-operation of these states are also represented through the eleven-star icon.

After the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the flag was further amended. Fourteen strips of white and red represents 13 states in Malaysia and including the federal government.

The amendments were made due the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak as a state member of the newly formed Malaysia. Also amended other than the stripes was also the eleven-star icon to the new fourteen-star icon.
NEW FEDERATION FLAG: Inche Mohd Salleh bin Hakim looks at the new Federation flag which was approved by the Federal Legislative Council yesterday (Wednesday). The flag was exhibited in the Council chamber.—Strait's Times picture.
Snippets of newspapers, from the council’s commentary of the flag design to hoisting flag ceremony at Sultan Selangor’s palace. The historic reporting gave the newly formed Federation a new hope, as to signify the beginning of a new nation.
FEDERATION FLAG FLOWN FOR THE FIRST TIME

From Our Staff Correspondent
KUALA LUMPUR, Friday

At a solemn ceremony on the large dew-covered lawn of the Istana Selangor, in Kuala Lumpur this morning—without music and without a word being spoken—the flag of the Federation of Malaya was officially hoisted for the first time by the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, in the presence of Malay Rulers.

The two visiting Cabinet Ministers, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. James Griffiths, and the Secretary of State for War, Mr. John Strachey, watched the ceremony with keen interest. This was their first meeting with Malay Royalty.

They were seated alongside five Sultans, three Regents, all dressed in Malay costume, and senior officials of the Federal Government. Behind them were Federal and State Councillors.

60-foot Flag Pole

Sir Henry, wearing full colonial uniform and white gloves, very slowly raised the new flag to the top of a 60-foot white flag pole.

He then stepped back and saluted, gazing at the flag for several seconds.

The Federation's first national flag—horizontal stripes alternately red and white, with a blue quarter on which a crescent and a 10-pointed star in yellow is superimposed—fluttered gently on the staff.

The Istana was surrounded by police and detectives and a police guard of honour was mounted on the lawn.

At each Sultan and Regent arrived at the Istana, the guard smartly presented a Royal salute.

After the ceremony, the two Ministers posed with the Sultans and Regents for a group photograph and for Malayan Film Unit cameramen.
On the 26th May 1950, for the first time, the national flag was raised within the Sultan of Selangor’s palace in Kuala Lumpur.

The Federation of Malaya flag raising official ceremony was attended by respectable Rulers and statesmen, namely Sultan of Selangor alongside his assistants, Haji Abdul Wahab bin Abdul Aziz (Chief Minister of Perak), Dato Mahmod bin Mat (Chief Minister of Pahang), Dato Onn bin Jaafar (Chief Minister of Johor), Encik Kamaruddin (Chief Minister of Terengganu), Nik Ahmad Kamil bin Haji Mahmud (Chief Minister of Kelantan), Raja Haji Ahmad bin Endut (Chief Minister of Perlis), Tunku Ismail bin Tunku Yahya (Chief Minister of Kedah) and Dato Abdul Malek bin Yusuf (Chief Minister of Negeri Sembilan).
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<th>BIL.</th>
<th>KEMENTERIAN/AGENSI</th>
<th>CADANGAN NAMA</th>
<th>MUKA SURAT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Kena Setiausaha, Perbendaharaan</td>
<td>1. Tsah</td>
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<td>2. Amanah Bangsa</td>
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<td>3. Panji Perdana</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Kena Setiausaha Pendidikan</td>
<td>1. Nusa Sateria</td>
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<td>2. Panji Nosta</td>
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<td>31 Dirgahayu Negara</td>
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<td>4. Panji Sateria</td>
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<td>2. Indera Sakit</td>
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<td>3. Indera Perpaduan</td>
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<td>4. Panji Jagat Maya</td>
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<td>5. Panji Perwira</td>
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<td>6. Andeka Alam</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. Megah Perkasa</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Perkasa Malaysia</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. Kena Setiausaha Kebudayaan, Kesenian & Pelancongan
   1. Peta Alom | 18
   2. Citra Nusa | 18
   3. Bahtera Merdeka | 18

5. Kena Setiausaha Kementerian Penerangan
   T I A D A | 19
The proposal for an official name for the Malaysian flag was suggested by Y.Bhg. Dato’ Hashim bin Mat Deris. He believes that Malaysian flag should be recognized and be given a proper name as how United Kingdom (Union Jack), U.S.A (Star Spangled Banner) and France (Tri-Colour) are recognized worldwide. It was then forwarded to then-Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on the 11th July 1995, as he agreed that a competition should be held in honor of the Malaysian flag. The competition was limited only to selected participants.

The following meeting was held on the 24th August 1995, chaired by the Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet, from the Ministry of Prime Minister. It was represented by Ministry of National Unity and Development, Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, Ministry of Communication, BERNAMA, Communication Department, Ministry of Prime Minister’s Official Department, Malaysia National Archive Department and Museum and Antiquity Department. It was agreed in the meeting that an immediate formation of committee and panel of judges is to take place.
It is emphasized in naming the flag, it must be well represented and be accepted by the people as a symbol of pride and patriotism. Elements such as supremacy of the people of Malaysia, national history and past struggles, symbols that represent federation emblems and its states, Islam as the official religion, colours of the national flag, and the warmth of Malaysians to be considered.
Criteria in naming the flag must consider the following:

1. The name must be done in Malaysian language.
2. It must be ‘emotive’ in nature, as it could trigger patriotism in showing loyalty to king and country.
3. Be adopted from the old transcripts e.g; Malay Annals.
4. Chosen from classical prose to represent loyalty and warrior.
5. Easy to enunciate.
7. Interesting sound.
8. Easy to explain.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIL.</th>
<th>KEMENTERIAN/JABATAN/AGENSI</th>
<th>CADANGAN NAMA</th>
<th>MIKA SURAT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Setiausaha Pertubuhan Berita Nasional Malaysia (BERNAMA)</td>
<td>1. Semangat Malaysia atau Semangat Negara</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Maju Malaysia</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>3. Setia Negara</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Urusetra</td>
<td>1. Seri Perkasa</td>
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<td>2. Seri Alam</td>
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<td>3. Wirawan</td>
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<td>4. Senjuang</td>
<td>34</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
After 40 years, the Malaysian flag was finally given a name, Jalur Gemilang (Glorious Stripes) and stands for the embodiment of Malaysians.

The flag stripes symbolize the direction of which the country heads, the same path and direction of the people in Malaysia.

Gemilang carries the meaning of bright, brilliant and excellence. Hence, the Jalur Gemilang represents the people and the nation’s excellence through persistence, loyalty and united in upholding the country’s image.

The colour red represents willingness, bold, valiant and persistent in facing challenges. White represents nobility and honesty, while blue represents unity, through obedience and peace, and yellow represents loyalty towards king and country.

The official ceremony of the naming the Malaysian flag, Jalur Gemilang, was held on 31st August 1997, 11:58 pm by then-Prime Minister Y.A.B Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad at Merdeka Square, Kuala Lumpur.
Epilogue

Building national identity takes more than just several sketches and discussions for great ideas. It takes sheer commitment and trust in managing conversations from various communities in designing a flag that would represent hope for future of Malaysia.

The greatness of the flag that stood for its nation was a sign that our leaders were not only visionary, but also had higher hopes for its people. Jalur Gemilang, from its earliest form, is an evolution of an idea that began as noble objectives, and later transcended into the context of a higher purpose.

We believe this report is one of many for us, at Make Condition, to constantly be in pursuit to understand how design can have great impact on nation building through its policies and objectives.
References


Unknown author (1949, August 10). Federation To Have Its Own Flag. The Malay Mail.


Unknown author (1950, April 20). The Federation Flag. The Malay Mail.}


