Star Special

THE STAR, SUNDAY 31 AUGUST 2025

NATIONAL DAY 2025

MALAYSIA MADANI
Rakyat Disantuni

‘Merdeka’ in every moment

Unity goes beyond grand displays of festivity. It shows in the small things – through a shared love for food, sports, culture and community. Today, we celebrate this harmony in motion by showing how Malaysians live and breathe the National Day spirit each and every day.

Unity in diversity, lived in everyday life

WHAT does Merdeka mean to Malaysians in 2025?

For some, it's a reminder of our country's beginnings. But for many young Malaysians today, it's something more personal – the freedom to be themselves, to speak openly, to belong without having to fit in.

In putting together this year's National Day Special, our team met with Malaysians from all walks of life, from kampung to campus grounds, and one thing stood out: unity in diversity isn't just a national motto.

It's something people are quietly living, every day.

We spoke to Ruhan Ravindran, a communications student from Kuantan, who told us that "Merdeka is about being able to study, connect and plan his future without fear."

Meanwhile, GX Lew from Petaling Jaya believes that true independence begins with free thought, being able to form your views and not just following the crowd.

Their voices echo across the stories in this special.

We saw unity in action at the Gawai parades in Sarawak, where people of different backgrounds celebrated together.

We found it in mixed badminton pairs who switch between Mandarin and Malay mid-match, in Kuala Lumpur City Hall's cultural troupe preserving heritage through dance, and in mixed marriages that bridge traditions with quiet strength.

And at Nyawa, a youth-led mental health organisation, we met passionate youths working to reshape mental healthcare in Malaysia, making it more open, inclusive and rooted in lived experiences.

These Malaysians aren't asking for grand gestures.

They're asking to be heard, trusted and included, not despite their differences but because of them.

This National Day, let's listen.

Let's honour the many ways Malaysians are already showing us how unity can be built, through compassion, mutual respect and everyday connection.

For Malaysians today, Merdeka means the freedom to live with dignity and the courage to make space for others to do the same.

Selamat Hari Kebangsaan.

Beyond **flags** *and* **festivities**

From kindergartens to kampung, Malaysia's unity must be built on shared values, not just symbolic gestures.

By BAVANI M.
bavanim@thestar.com.my

Performers in traditional attire from various ethnic groups presenting a colourful cultural dance during the Harmony Week celebration.

AS Malaysia marks its 68th National Day, National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang sat down with *The Star* for an exclusive interview.

He urged Malaysians to look beyond slogans and celebrations, and start living the values of unity, harmony and mutual respect in everyday life.

Living the Rukun Negara

This National Day, Aaron reflects on the deeper meaning behind the Rukun Negara and why unity must go beyond symbolic gestures.

"Unity events bring people together, but does that necessarily make a country harmonious?" he asked.

"The real question is, are we truly living in harmony?"

That was Aaron's candid response when asked what the concept of "Unity in Diversity" meant to him and how it has shaped his role in fostering cohesion among Malaysians.

"There's a fine line between unity and harmony – two ideals often used interchangeably, but not always realised side by side," he noted.

More than just a slogan

"You asked what Unity in Diversity means to me.

"Well, it's not just a slogan. It's a belief that guides everything I do," Aaron said.

"Malaysia is made up of many different cultures and communities, and that's our strength.

"But unity doesn't happen automatically, it takes intention.

"We must be willing to understand, respect and accept one another.

"At the ministry, we practise what we preach. Our team reflects the country's diversity. We welcome different views, encourage honest conversations and build trust from within.

"Outside (of the) government, we use education, the arts and grassroots programmes to bring Malaysians together," he elaborated.

This year's National Day theme, "Malaysia Madani: *Rakyat Disantuni*" (Compassion for the People), captures that spirit.

"Malaysia Madani, introduced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, is a vision of an inclusive, ethical and compassionate nation built on values like sustainability, innovation, respect and trust.

> **Unity doesn't happen automatically, it takes intention. We must be willing to understand, respect and accept one another.**
>
> DATUK AARON AGO DAGANG

"As for '*Rakyat Disantuni*', it means the people are treated with dignity, kindness and care," said Aaron.

"To me, that's what harmony looks like. It's not just about coexisting, it's about connecting. It's about showing up for one another across race, religion and region. That's unity in diversity.

Aaron (centre) with student volunteers proudly displaying their certificates at a Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa event, an initiative under National Unity Ministry that promotes volunteerism as a means of strengthening national integration and unity.

"We are a diverse nation and naturally, there will be moments of misunderstanding.

"That's why we must always return to the enduring principles of the Rukun Negara, not just during official events but in our daily lives," he emphasised.

Aaron also reflected on the country's history and the lessons learned from its darkest chapters.

"We have had periods of bloodshed, a stark contrast to the ideals we aspire to today. It was from those painful moments that the government introduced strategic policies like the Rukun Negara," he said.

"We recite it at events, but how many of us truly live by its values?"

The five principles – Belief in God; Loyalty to King and Country; Supremacy of the Constitution; Rule of Law; and Courtesy and Morality – were introduced after the May 13 tragedy and remain, in Aaron's words, "the nation's moral compass".

Building unity takes work

"Unity is not something we inherit, it's something we build, nurture and renew," said Aaron.

"It also requires effort. If we don't practise understanding, respect and acceptance, then ignorance becomes our biggest obstacle.

"It's like living under a *tempurung* (coconut shell), unaware of the world beyond. When you

Faith leaders and participants gathering for a group photo during the 'Jejak Harmoni' programme at a Buddhist temple in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur; and (right) other participants posing in front of a Hindu temple in Sentul. The National Unity Ministry initiative promotes mutual respect and understanding among Malaysians through interfaith visits to places of worship.

The Harmony Week celebration highlights Malaysia's rich heritage and promotes unity through the vibrancy of its diverse communities.

Pupils from a Unity Kindergarten reciting a pledge during a school event. With 1,741 centres nationwide, these multiethnic preschools under the National Unity Ministry aim to instil values of respect, empathy and national identity from an early age.

shut yourself off, you start believing only your way is right, and rejecting how others live or think.

"That's why we always say: get to know your neighbour. Accept their culture. Respect their beliefs. That's the essence of unity."

Aaron also flagged growing concerns over social media.

"Even a simple TikTok video can spark tension. Social media is a dilemma for us.

"Yes, we have agencies to monitor it, but it remains a serious concern," he acknowledged.

Unity on the ground

"It's easy to talk about unity, but what does it actually look like?" Aaron asked.

"It's not about slogans or big speeches. It's about people coming together in everyday settings – from kindergartens to kampung, from museums to markets."

One of the ministry's flagship initiatives is Unity Week, held annually in every state, with one state selected to host the national-level celebration.

This year, Penang hosted the event from July 17 to 20, featuring over 100 activities that ranged from food fairs to public forums.

The highlight was the "*Jelajah Kembara Perpaduan*", a nationwide tour that carried the message of respect, understanding and togetherness.

Unity begins young

"If you want to build unity, start young," said Aaron. "That's why the ministry operates 1,741 Tabika Perpaduan (Unity Kindergartens) centres nationwide.

"These aren't just any preschools," he pointed out. "They're intentionally multiethnic spaces where children learn and grow together.

"Alongside ABCs and 123s, children are introduced to the Rukun Negara, not through textbooks but through songs, stories and games.

"It's a gentle yet powerful way to raise children who understand kindness, respect and shared identity."

Another initiative is the "*Bahasa Kolokial*" series, which celebrates the dialects Malaysians use to communicate.

"Unity isn't just in policy. It's also in the way we speak – Sabahan slang, Kelantanese expressions and Penang street talk. These words carry culture and memory," said the minister.

Since 2023, 11 forums have been held nationwide, culminating in the 2024 National Convention on Colloquial Language which gathered linguists, community leaders and everyday Malaysians in an effort to preserve local dialects before they vanish.

Empowering communities

The Unity ministry also supports more than 10,000 Kawasan Rukun Tetangga (KRT) across the country under its Progressive KRT Empowerment Programme.

"These began in the 1970s to foster social harmony and address local issues. Today, they're platforms for community business and leadership," said Aaron.

With funding, training and resources, some KRT have launched food stalls and urban farms. As of 2024, 152 had been recognised for their success.

"When locals are empowered, they come up with the best solutions," Aaron added.

History comes alive

Another crowd-favourite is Citra Nusa @ Museum, a programme that brings history to life through crafts, storytelling and overnight stays in museums.

"In partnership with the Department of Museums Malaysia, we invite students to spend the night at a museum and explore Malaysia's cultural roots.

"Imagine spending the night in Lembah Bujang, surrounded by 1,500 years of history.

"It's not about memorising dates. It's about feeling connected to the people and legacies that shaped us," Aaron highlighted.

A Merdeka message from the minister

"This National Day, let us remember that independence is not just a celebration of the past, but a responsibility for the future," Aaron reminded Malaysians.

He also had a powerful reminder for the people: "Merdeka is more than a date in history; it is a daily commitment to living with empathy, respect and shared purpose.

"True freedom comes when we stand united, not despite our differences but because of them. Let us embrace our diversity with pride, practise mutual respect and build bridges of understanding."

He called on all Malaysians, from community leaders to politicians, from youth to everyday citizens, to rise above narrow interests and divisive rhetoric.

"The responsibility on our shoulders is immense. We must be the custodians of unity, the defenders of harmony and the champions of a future where no Malaysian is left behind," he said.

Leadership, he stressed, must be grounded in the values of the Rukun Negara.

"These aren't just words. They are our national contract.

"Happy National Day!"

What does Merdeka mean *to you-th?*

Young M'sians reimagine the country's future, 68 years on.

By ALISA IDRIS
metro@thestar.com.my

AS Malaysia celebrates its National Day, young Malaysians reflect on what independence means to them. From digital activism to everyday kindness, their voices echo a shared belief in "unity through diversity, a nation strengthened not by sameness, but by respect for differences".

"It's about the freedom to be myself."

Ruhan Ravindran, 23, Kuantan, Pahang – Communication student, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Being able to pursue what I love, study, build my career, make friends and connect with people without fear of discrimination – that, to me, is Merdeka. It's heartening to see Malaysians standing united despite our differences.

The more we engage and understand each other, the stronger our national bond becomes.

"The joy of sharing space and stories."

Tashmanth Poobalan, 23, Bukit Mertajam, Penang – Electronic Engineering student, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Merdeka is about living side by side with friends from all backgrounds – Malays, Chinese, Indians, Orang Asli – studying together, sharing stories over teh tarik and laughing through late-night assignments.

What gives me hope is how we're using digital platforms to connect and amplify voices that have long been unheard. If we truly listen, support local causes and celebrate each other's cultures, we can build real unity.

"Appreciation, not just tolerance."

Lee June Ling, 21, Sandakan, Sabah – English Language student, Unitar

Merdeka means being able to mix freely with people of all races and appreciate what each culture brings to the table.

The younger generation is more open now, and that gives me hope. Even if we don't follow the same customs, we can still respect and live harmoniously with each other.

"Freedom means being seen and heard."

Alisa Adriana Mohamad Idris, Cyberjaya – Intern

True freedom is when my ideas are valued at work and I am not being judged by my skin colour, religion or the language I speak.

I see more women entering the workforce today, and that tells me we're growing into a more inclusive society.

A shared national language helps us communicate, but embracing the many languages we speak at home also helps us connect on a deeper level.

"It starts with free thought."

Lew Guan Xi, 23, Petaling Jaya, Selangor – Writer

We're not truly independent if our thinking is still shaped by outdated norms or societal pressure.

Merdeka is the freedom to form your own opinions.

To build unity, we need to start seeing each other as Malaysians first.

We've made progress, but we still have a way to go.

"#kitajagakita showed us what unity looks like."

Nur Amira Natasya Tsalimy, 24, Kajang, Selangor – Bachelor of Science student, UiTM Shah Alam

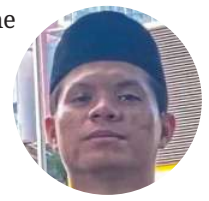
During the Covid-19 lockdowns, people didn't wait for instructions, they just helped. #kitajagakita wasn't a slogan, it was action. That's Merdeka.

Social media now helps bring issues to the surface quickly, whether it's floods or injustice.

But unity also requires courage to call out racism and classism, even when it's uncomfortable – especially then.

"Being Malaysian means living without fear."

Muhammad Feris Aulia, 24, Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur – Student, UniKL MIAT



For me, it's the ability to live peacefully, speak freely and be part of a multiracial community.

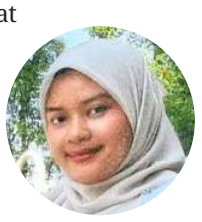
I find hope in how people are standing up for one another more often, regardless of race or religion. Unity starts with small acts, learning about each other, celebrating together and simply being kind.

"Merdeka means breaking free from old mindsets."

Nur Saidatul Huda Zazali, 23, Jengka, Pahang – Bachelor of Agribusiness Science student, Universiti Putra Malaysia

It's not just about being free from colonisation. It's about freedom from discrimination and from toxic or narrow thinking.

When I see more women succeeding in education and careers, I see that change happening.



We'll be stronger as a nation when we close the gaps between us, economically, socially and educationally – and Gen Z is ready to lead that charge.

"Online spaces should value ideas, not identity."

Theynavan Punithan, 24, Port Dickson, Negri Sembilan – Bachelor of Business Administration student, Unitar

Merdeka means being able to contribute ideas online and be judged on what I say, not who I am.

Of course there are boundaries, but being able to share thoughts without prejudice is its own kind of freedom.

I am hopeful when I see young Malaysians making the most of digital spaces. From women running online businesses to youth pushing for change, it proves that the Internet can level the playing field.

Even viral dance trends and charity drives show us coming together as Malaysians.

"Compassion makes Malaysia feel like home."

Tengku Ayuna Shamelin, 21, Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur – Mass Communication student, UiTM Melaka *(main pic, first from left)*

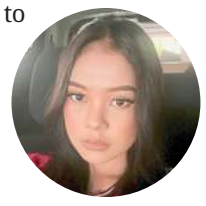
It's not just about chasing dreams or speaking up; it's about being proud of who I am, without fear or judgement.

What gives me hope is when strangers help each other, no questions asked.

If we can appreciate each other's cultures like we do each other's food, we'll be just fine. Respect goes a long way.

"Kindness is our common ground."

Nurul Hanani binti Abdul Aziz, 22, Klang, Selangor – Communication student, Universiti Sains Malaysia



I'm grateful to be able to live in peace, surrounded by friends of all backgrounds. That's freedom to me.

What gives me hope is how unafraid our generation is to speak up, question and change things. Unity doesn't have to be complicated – respect each other, show up for causes that matter and lead with kindness. That's enough to start.

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Life in the *heart of harmony*

Muhamad@Ropali (left), who moved to Kampung Malaysia Raya in 1952, posing with four generations of family outside his wooden house. (Right) despite being surrounded by development, the village retains its rural roots with an urban farm which is home to several sheep.

In the shadow of KL's urban sprawl, one small kampung quietly lives the National Day spirit every day.

By BAVANI M.
bavanim@thestar.com.my
Photos by YAP CHEE HONG

TUCKED within Kuala Lumpur's sprawling urban jungle is a village with a name steeped in journey, faith and nationhood. Welcome to Kampung Malaysia Raya.

While it may not ring a bell to most city dwellers, for its residents, this kampung is more than just a postcode. It is a living, breathing reminder of unity, community and a shared Malaysian identity.

Located in Sungai Besi within the Bandar Tun Razak parliamentary constituency, the kampung was originally known as Kampung Melayu in the 1960s.

It was later renamed Kampung Malaysia and eventually, the word Raya was added to commemorate a passenger liner called *Malaysia Raya*, which was once used by the Malaysian government to transport haj pilgrims to Mecca via Jeddah.

Many of the kampung folk were passengers on that ship.

"My late father was one of the pilgrims on that ship. It was a proud moment, a symbol of togetherness and faith," said Kampung Malaysia Raya Rukun Tetangga chairman Mohd Zainudin Amran (*pic*), 63.

The kampung's name, bestowed in 1970s, still holds deep meaning for village elders who remember the pride of having their community named after something so noble and far-reaching.

But today, what defines Kampung Malaysia Raya is not its past, but the people who call it home.

Here, families of different races and religions – now in their fourth generation – live side by side, some in the kind of harmony often idealised in Merdeka speeches.

"The kampung spirit isn't something we talk about; it's something we live by," said Mohd Zainudin.

The kampung sits on 5.26ha land with 77 residential lots.

While the majority of the residents are Malays, the Seri Malaysia People's Housing Programme (PPR) government housing scheme in the village has a mix of Malay, Chinese and Indian residents.

Sharimah riding her electric bicycle past the Kampung Malaysia Raya welcome arch in Sungai Besi.

"It's a small township where you can walk from one end to another in under an hour," said long-time resident Sharimah Isah, 59.

"But many of the older folk here, including myself, prefer to use electric bicycles," she said with a laugh.

Her neighbour, Nikmarina Mat Hassan, 66, prefers walking as it gives her the chance to greet fellow residents and check in on others along the way.

"We have many elderly folk living here, and sometimes it's good to keep an eye on them," said Nikmarina.

Another resident, Nur Amirah Chan, 59, who moved to the kampung after marrying a local man 38 years ago, loves the peace and camaraderie of the area.

"It's so peaceful and quiet, and everyone here is friendly and helpful. It's like one big family," she said.

"The *muhibbah* spirit here is real. You'll see Malays, Indians, Chinese and others sitting together at one table, chatting like family," said Vathani Maniam, a resident of the Seri Malaysia PPR who frequently visits the kampung for community events.

"It reminds me of being part of one big happy family."

Whether it's preparing food for shared festivities, lending a hand during *gotong-royong* or simply waving to each other from the porch, the residents of Kampung Malaysia Raya have long embraced the true meaning of unity.

"Most of us grew up here or have lived here for decades. We know each other's families, birthdays, even their kids' names," said Mohd Zainudin.

The kampung's oldest resident, 92-year-old Muhamad@Ropali Hassan, moved there in 1952 from Rawang in search of work. He eventually found employment dredging tin at a nearby mine.

"Back then, the village was barren land," he recalled.

"Those who came later built their wooden houses from scratch.

"As the years went by, many renovated and extended their homes with brick and stone," he said.

Muhamad@Ropali, who lives with his daughters and grandchildren, still resides in his original wooden house.

One place that brings everyone together, literally and emotionally, is the Sungai Midah Flood Retention pond not far from the kampung.

Nestled within walking distance, the lake is more than a recreational space.

It's the beating heart of the community.

Every morning, you'll find people jogging along the path, some doing light stretches or catching up over *kopi* and *teh tarik* on the benches nearby.

In the evenings, it becomes a gathering spot for families, children and retirees, all soaking in the last light of day side by side.

"It's our sanctuary," said Mohd Zainudin, who is also the Sungai Midah Flood Retention Pond Nature Lovers Club chairman.

"The lake is where we come to breathe, to think, to be with each other.

"We don't need big shopping malls or fancy parks. This lake is enough," he said.

As Malaysia celebrates its 68th year of independence, Kampung Malaysia Raya stands as a quiet reminder of the Merdeka dream – not just freedom from colonial rule, but freedom to live with dignity, in peace and with one another.

It's easy to get cynical in today's world, but in this little kampung named after a ship and held together by a lake, you'll find something rare: a version of Malaysia where unity isn't just a theme, it's a way of life.

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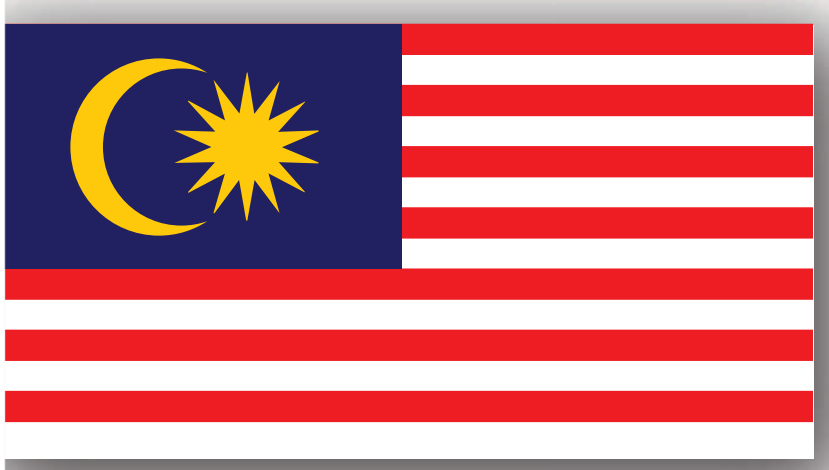

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(From top) The Niti Daun parade in Kuching showcases Sarawak's rich cultural diversity and harmony; an Orang Ulu contingent walking past a crowd of onlookers during the Niti Daun parade; and the Bidayuh community of Kampung Taee parading through the village.

A festival of **pride and friendship**

Across Sarawak, Gawai welcomes everyone with open arms and hearts.

By SHARON LING
sharonling@thestar.com.my
Photos by ZULAZHAR SHEBLEE

AMID the rhythmic beats of the brass gongs and drums, Bidayuh villagers dressed in full traditional attire walked through Kampung Taee near Serian, Sarawak, in a vibrant spectacle of culture and harmony.

This was the village's annual Gawai parade, known as Birarak, which is held in conjunction with the harvest festival celebrated by Sarawak's Dayak communities on June 1.

In keeping with common practice in Sarawak during festivals, this was also more than just a Bidayuh celebration, as Sarawakians from all backgrounds came to Kampung Taee to attend the parade and celebrate together.

"Gawai is a festival we all look forward to each year and it is not only celebrated by the Dayaks," said Tebedu assemblyman Dr Simon Sinang, the parade's guest of honour.

"If you look around, we have people from all races gathering here to celebrate."

The same diversity was on display at the state-level Niti Daun Gawai parade in Kuching on June 21, which brought together 3,000 participants from the Orang Ulu, Iban and Bidayuh communities along with thousands of onlookers.

Among them was Syallemah Ismail, who attended the parade with her family for the first time.

"We brought our children to watch it with us. We wanted to see all the different traditional costumes and get to know our own state better, especially all the different ethnicities and their cultures," said the mother of three.

Speaking from personal experience, Syallemah said one reason why Sarawakians celebrated festivals together was because there were many mixed families in the state.

"My mother is Iban and my father is mixed Chinese-Malay, so we celebrate Chinese New Year as well as Gawai with our relatives in Kapit. During Raya, they'll all come and celebrate with us," she said.

Syallemah said this shows Sarawak's unity as families and friends shared their festive occasions with mutual respect.

As an example, she said, her Iban and Bidayuh friends would provide plates specially for their Muslim guests to eat from.

"And during Raya, we sometimes share *baju kurung* with non-Muslim friends.

> **Gawai is a festival we all look forward to each year ... If you look around, we have people from all races gathering here to celebrate.**
>
> DR SIMON SINANG

"We also share our food like curry and *kek lapis*," she added.

The Niti Daun parade participants shared a similar sense of pride in Sarawak's cultural diversity and harmony.

College student Vanessa Livan Sigau (*pic*), who is of mixed Kayan-Kenyah heritage, said: "Sarawakians are known for their tolerance and acceptance of one another regardless of race or religion.

"This is why we can celebrate together.

"We can show our traditions and share our culture with one another during events like the Gawai parade," she said.

Watt Enjup (*pic*), from the Terabai Menua Welfare Association, said the parade was an opportunity to showcase Sarawak's unity.

"Sarawak has many different ethnicities, but we are all united.

"Everyone in Sarawak comes for the parade.

"There is unity among the people as well as the various associations and NGOs taking part," he observed.

Back in Kampung Taee, Simon said everyone was welcome to join the Gawai celebration throughout Sarawak.

"Everyone who comes is welcomed with friendliness and hospitality. We can live together in peace and harmony despite our different backgrounds.

"This makes me proud to be Sarawakian," he said.

MALAYSIA MADANI
Rakyat Disantuni

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A homeland's rise *through the eyes of time*

From grainy black-and-white images of 1957 to the vibrant, high-definition snapshots of today, the evolution of National Day celebrations around the country reflects the journey of a young nation coming into its own.

1978 Rain couldn't dampen the Merdeka spirit as Malaysians huddled under umbrellas to watch the parade, their vibrant '70s fashion adding colour to the grey skies. — YEONG CHEONG/The Star

1979 A lively display of unity in diversity as colourfully dressed 'couples' representing Malaysia's many races rode by in trishaws. — CHAN LOOI TAT/The Star

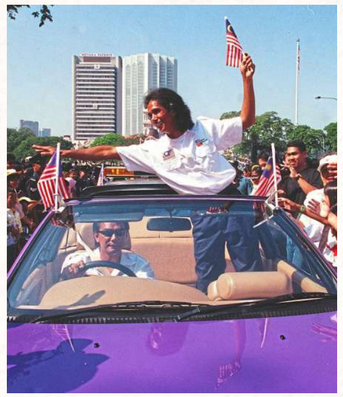
1980 With boots in sync and pride in stride, female police cadets made a striking sight as they marched through Kuala Lumpur during the parade. — MOK YONG/The Star

1957 The iconic image of the nation's first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman raising his hand, rousing the rakyat with the clarion call of 'Merdeka!'.

1989 *The Star* photographer SS Kanesan captured this moment of photography students honing their skills during the Merdeka parade in Kuala Lumpur.

2009 A striking display of patriotism as marchers carried a long stretch of the Jalur Gemilang during the Malacca-level National Day parade at Dataran Pahlawan. — A. MALEX YAHAYA/The Star

2012 A ride down memory lane as cyclists dressed in vintage clothing joined the 55th Merdeka parade at the Esplanade in George Town, Penang. — MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/The Star



1999 Datuk Azhar Mansor, the first Malaysian to sail solo around the world, rode in a purple Proton Cabriolet prototype as he greeted Malaysians during the Merdeka parade. — SIA HONG KIAU/The Star

2008 Dancers celebrating the 51st Merdeka with a colourful parade in Kuantan, Pahang. — NIK NAIZI HUSIN/The Star

2023 Several 'Abang Bomba' from the Fire and Rescue Department flexing their muscles for adoring fans during the parade in Putrajaya. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

Punching through *the glass ceiling*

Women founders rise above cultural bias to carve their own path in the corporate world.

By FINTAN NG
fintan@thestar.com.my

THERE is now greater awareness of gender, diversity and inclusion issues in corporate Malaysia, with more men leaning into the discussions and willing to play vital roles in supporting women.

Championing ideals such as unity must also mean acknowledging the role of women, who comprise half the population, and their contributions in the workplace.

More importantly, it means shifting mindsets and shaping institutions to enable capable women to move up the corporate ladder.

This is not as easy as it may seem: While women have made strides in corporate Malaysia through their representation on the boards of public-listed companies or in decision-making positions, Grant Thornton's "Women in Business Report" released in March shows that the journey is still a challenging one.

The report reveals a decline in the number of women holding senior management roles in the country. This can have a negative impact, as fewer women senior managers mean fewer choices to fill board roles.

The findings show that the number of women in such roles dropped to 36.2% this year from 39.6% last year and 40.4% in 2023. The number of businesses without a woman in their senior management has risen to 9.3% in 2025 from just 2.8% last year.

Despite the overall decline, there were some increases in key leadership positions – notably, in chief executive officer (CEO) and managing director (MD) roles, which rose by 4.2 percentage points to 16.3%.

While the advance of women CEOs is a good sign, as this is a stepping stone to a board seat of a listed company if they have not already achieved it, the report's findings also show that 46.5% of businesses disclosed a decline in the number of women chief financial officers (CFOs), down from 54.2% last year, and 18.6% of businesses revealed a drop in the number of women chief operating officers (COOs) from 21.5% last year.

Besides CEO roles, CFO and chief marketing officer (CMO) roles have traditionally been a path towards board seats.

Rejina Rahim, adviser to the Institutional Investors Council Malaysia as well as the founder of a fintech startup, said the decline in the number of women in senior management roles directly affected public-listed companies' board readiness.

Describing the problem as a "pipeline" issue, she said, "There are plenty of capable women but many are not given stretch opportunities, especially in profit-and-loss roles that are often the stepping stones to board positions."

Dzuleira Abu Bakar, co-founder of a boutique corporate advisory firm and former group CEO of Mranti Corp, said capable women were no longer waiting to access top decision-making roles but instead taking steps to take control of their own destiny by starting their own ventures, becoming founders and placing themselves in the driver's seat.

"While the numbers are still emerging, the trend is unmistakable and it's reshaping what leadership looks like.

"Women are no longer pushing against closed doors; they're building their own," she said.

> **Women are no longer pushing against closed doors; they're building their own.**
>
> DZULEIRA ABU BAKAR

Jenny George, dean of University of Melbourne's business school, emphasised how employers needed to have a comprehensive re-entry ecosystem and more inclusive, future-focused hiring strategies.

"We're losing highly capable women who could be the very ones stepping into senior roles."

A lot more can be done about the hiring policy in Asia, where 92% of employers do not have a recruitment strategy targeted at returning women.

Meanwhile, a Robert Walters report shows that 52% of hiring managers in Malaysia have yet to employ returning women in the past.

Culture and leadership

While much progress has been made in corporate Malaysia where women's roles are concerned – and the business world in general since independence, when business leaders and their management teams were almost exclusively male – the old ways do not fade away easily.

"Let's be frank – yes, cultural biases and the old boys' network still exist in parts of corporate Malaysia.

"While some progress has been made, many board and senior management appointments are still relationship-based, not merit-based," said Rejina.

For Dzuleira, cultural bias shapes institutional design, and institutional gaps reinforce cultural bias.

"To change this, we need both policy-level reform and a mindset shift, from how we hire, mentor, invest and build inclusive cultures to how we measure leadership and value diverse forms of expertise," she said, citing how institutional structures are often not built to support women, especially those balancing work and caregiving.

"I've seen firsthand how the challenges we face are both systemic and deeply cultural. It's not just about being the only (or a few if you're lucky) woman in the room; it's about constantly having to prove your capability, resilience and right to lead."

While she believes things are slowly changing, there are still unspoken biases.

In addition, opportunities for access to funding, flexible pathways or being considered for technical leadership roles are still harder to come by.

Amy Chua, who is leading the integration of SLB (a provider of energy solutions) with ChampionX (which offers upstream and midstream oilfield and gas solutions) following SLB's acquisition of ChampionX, said the working environment and corporate culture played a critical role in supporting and developing female leadership.

There have been positive changes over the years in Malaysia's corporate world in terms of inclusion, gender equity and leadership diversity, and more men are engaging in these discussions as allies.

"While we've made progress in improving gender diversity at senior management levels, unconscious bias and persistent stereotypes continue to frame women as less capable, limiting their opportunities," Chua said.

She added that in the Malaysian context and across much of Asia, women carry significant responsibilities in family life as they were often also primary caregivers to ageing parents or they took on added responsibilities as supportive daughters or elder siblings.

Indeed, a World Bank survey report released on July 22 showed that many women aged over 30 in the country tend to leave the workforce permanently instead of taking a career break, with care responsibilities and compliance with maternity regulations as major barriers, reinforcing Chua's views.

"This dual burden of professional ambition and familial duty is a reality that must be acknowledged and addressed if we are to truly advance gender equity in leadership," she said.

George believes the root of the issue lies in the "single peak" pattern of female workforce participation, with many exiting the workforce midcareer and 42% in Malaysia citing childcare as the primary reason.

When combined with outdated skills, biased hiring practices and a lack of flexible work structures, it becomes clear why the leadership pipeline thins out.

Despite high educational attainment – women make up 61% of university graduates in the country – they make up only 55.6% of the labour force compared to 82.3% for men.

George said the challenge was not about qualifications – it's about retention and re-entry, with women in Malaysia facing significant hurdles in re-entering the workforce after career breaks. This, in turn, has significant economic implications.

"These gains – or rather, missed opportunities – highlight the necessity for comprehensive support systems and a shift in cultural and organisational attitudes, or we risk losing out on nearly half of our workforce within a matter of 10 or 15 years from when they first come on stream," she added.

(From left) Rejina, Dzuleira, Chua and George.

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HARI KEBANGSAAN KE 68

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Aged between 19 and 41, the dancers dedicate themselves fully to their craft, showcasing the richness of Malaysia's cultural heritage on stages across the globe.

Dancing for **the nation**

DBKL's cultural troupe brings Malaysia's rich heritage to the world stage, one graceful step at a time.

By BAVANI M.
bavanim@thestar.com.my
Photos by KAMARUL ARIFFIN

THEY train year-round, don traditional attire with pride and perform across the globe as living embodiments of Malaysia's multicultural spirit.

Meet the dancers of Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) whose every move tells a story of unity, identity and home.

Every time Natasha Idris Silva, 41, and Kesavaen Krishnamoorthy, 32, take the stage, they are not just performing a routine; they are representing Malaysia.

As full-time dancers with DBKL's Culture, Arts, Tourism and Sports Department, the duo have performed around the world, donning costumes as diverse as the country itself, from *kebaya*, *qipao*, saree and kurta to *marik empang* and *kain kebat* which are traditional wear for Iban women, and *babaru puputul*, the distinctive Murut male costume that is traditionally worn by warriors from Sabah and Sarawak.

For them, Merdeka isn't just marked once a year. It lives in every performance, especially when overseas audiences stop them after shows, eager to learn more about the vibrant, multicultural nation they proudly showcase on stage.

Natasha and Kesavaen are part of DBKL's 52-member dance troupe – 29 women and 23 men – who perform at major national and international events all year round.

Aged between 19 and 41, the dancers dedicate themselves fully to their craft, showcasing the richness of Malaysia's cultural heritage on the world stage.

"I've performed in every country in Asia and across Europe, and no matter what costume I'm wearing – Malay, Chinese, Indian or from Sabah or Sarawak – the pride and joy of representing my country is always just as powerful.

"Each time I take the stage, I'm not just dancing; I'm telling Malaysia's story," said Natasha who hails from Perak.

"People often come up to us after a performance to take photos and ask about our country.

"Many say they've never seen anything like our shows before. That's when we know we've left an impact," said Kesavaen who is from Kuala Lumpur.

"It's a wonderful feeling to be appreciated for our differences, and we experience that a lot when performing abroad," said Haslinda Abdul Halim, 36, from Ipoh.

"It makes me so proud to see people enjoying our shows and wanting to know more about us."

Adam Khaiqal, 31, from Selangor, said: "The support we receive overseas really boosts our morale, especially when we're far from home."

Fellow dancer Siti Aishah Mustapha Kamal, 25, shared how some of her most treasured moments were the ones after the curtain falls.

"Sometimes, audience members come up just to say thank you. They admire our clothes and ask questions about our dances and cultures, which makes me proud to be Malaysian," she said.

For 21-year-old dancer Nor Muhammad Hijjahie, the strength of the troupe lies not just in their talent, but in their togetherness.

"We all come from different backgrounds, but we move as one. That's what Malaysia is about: unity in diversity," he said.

Ninie Marlina Ahmaden, 31, agreed: "When I dance alongside friends from different races and states, wearing each other's traditional outfits, it reminds me that unity isn't just something we talk about; we live it on and off the stage."

DBKL dance trainer Malinda Mohamed, 54, who has been with the troupe for decades, said the work never stopped, but neither does the passion.

"It's a constant cycle of rehearsals and performances. We're busiest during peak periods like Federal Territory Day, the festive seasons, Merdeka, Malaysia Day and events like KL Genta Festival," she said.

"It's hard work but thankfully, they all love what they do," she added.

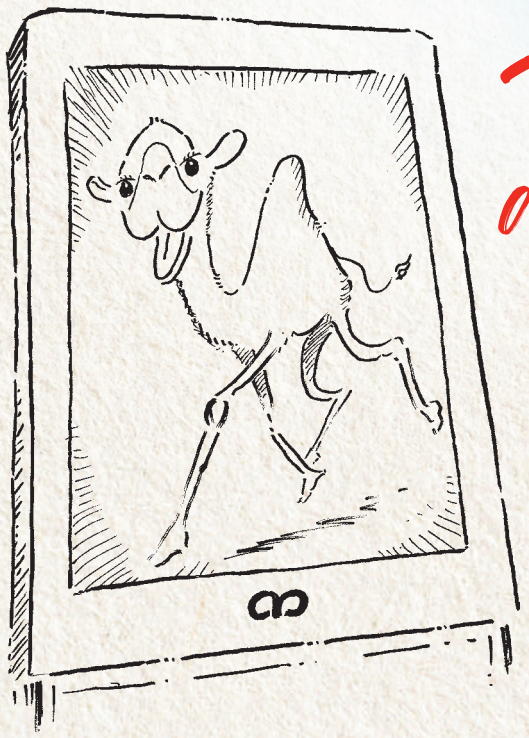
DBKL has made culture, music and tourism key pillars in its agenda in the lead-up to Visit Malaysia 2026.

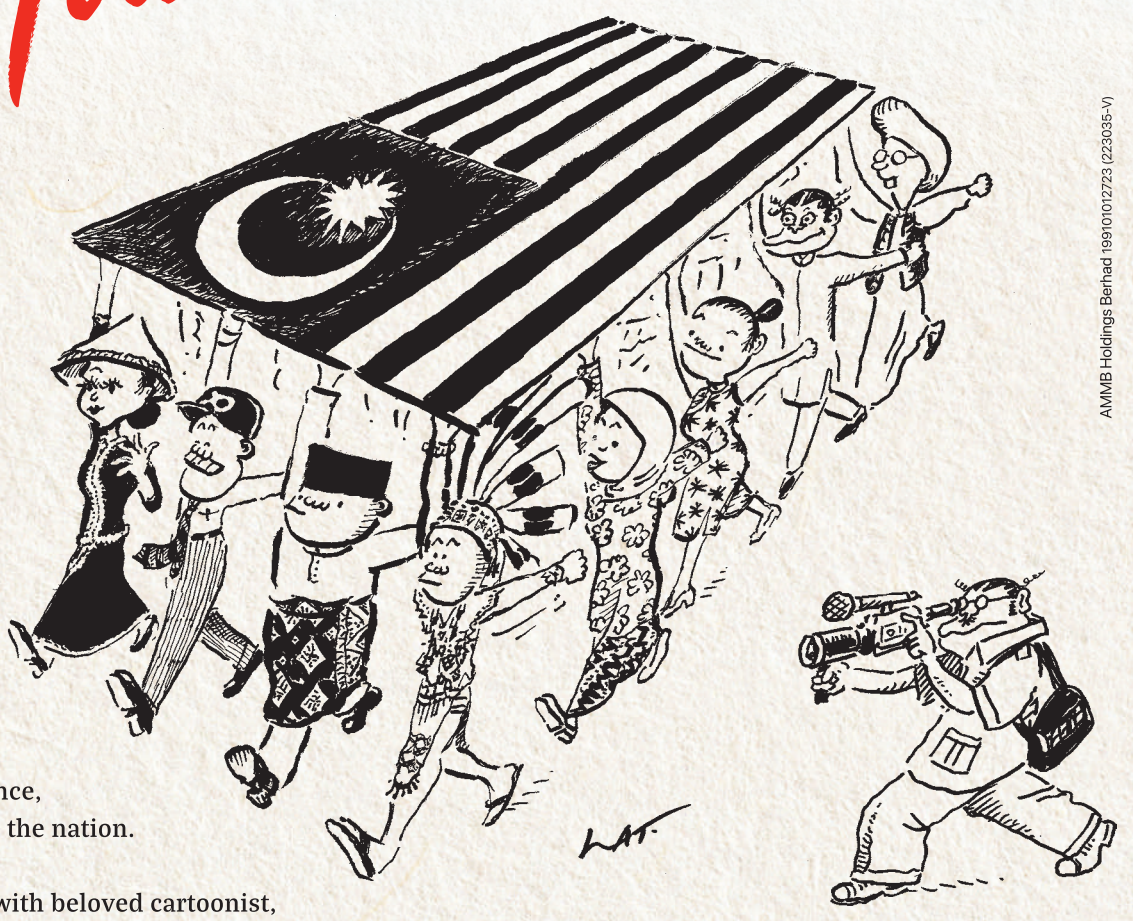
The city is planning a multitude of lifestyle programmes throughout the year, including art, dance and musical showcases, food festivals and cultural parades to revitalise the economy and create more opportunities for local talents.

As the dancers continue to take Malaysia's cultural heritage to the world one step at a time, they remain a moving embodiment of Merdeka – diverse, united and proud.

Selamat Menyambut

Hari Kebangsaan dan Hari Malaysia





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Our Malaysia: Then & Always

This year, as Malaysia celebrates her 68th year of independence, AmBank Group celebrates 50 years of growing together with the nation.

In conjunction with Merdeka and Malaysia Day, we reunite with beloved cartoonist, Dato' Lat, to bring nostalgia to life through a monumental illustration on our headquarters, as a symbol of commitment as timeless as his art.

For five decades, AmBank Group has stood alongside Malaysians through every change, challenge, and triumph. Championing sustainability, empowering communities, and creating lasting impact through ESG and CSR initiatives.

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50 YEARS MALAYSIA KITA

Stigma turns **into strength**

Mental health advocacy for youth bears fruit, from society to policy.

By MING TEOH
lifestyle@thestar.com.my

ONCE cloaked in silence and stigma, youth mental health is now widely discussed, with the field increasingly shaped by visibility and activism.

At the forefront of this shift is youth-led mental health NGO, Nyawa Organisation.

What began as a grassroots response to the Covid-19 mental health crisis, has evolved into a dynamic movement of young Malaysians from all walks of life reclaiming their voices and reshaping care.

Nyawa's diverse and multicultural team – director Farihin Ufiya Mohd Azeem, 29, from Sungai Petani in Kedah, who is of Malay-Chindian parentage; advocacy lead Jernell Tan, 32, a Hokkien Chinese from Butterworth, Penang; and clinical lead Nayli Bisnu, 27, who is a Kayan of the Orang Ulu tribe from Kuching, Sarawak – share how far we've come as a nation, the challenges ahead and the hope that drives their work forward.

Speaking out, stepping up

"Mental health has come a long way in our country, though progress isn't always linear," said Tan.

Until the 2010s, Malaysia's mental health landscape was largely adult-led and clinical, and youth were often excluded from the conversation.

Over time, however, young people didn't just speak out – they stepped up.

They have created peer support spaces, advocated for change and carved their presence into policy discussions that were once inaccessible.

Farihin Ufiya traces Nyawa's roots to the height of the Covid-19 pandemic – a time when isolation and uncertainty triggered a surge in mental health issues.

"We saw the stigma surrounding mental health slowly giving way to openness," she said.

"It wasn't just a crisis; it became a catalyst."

That national shift led to critical changes, like the decriminalisation of suicide in 2023, which encouraged people to seek emergency support without fear, and the establishment of the National Centre for Excellence in Mental Health by Health Ministry as the central point to control, coordinate and monitor mental health services.

Despite this, youth distress remains a major concern, noted Tan.

The 2022 Adolescent Health Survey found that one in four teenagers aged 13 to 17 experiences depression.

Rates of anxiety and suicidality remain high; what drives this rise in mental health issues is cause for concern.

Awareness, advocacy and early intervention are necessary, said Farihin Ufiya.

While genetics and life experiences played a role in mental health, she pointed out the broader mismatch between modern life and biological systems.

Farihin Ufiya believes the roots go beyond individual factors: "From constant social media comparison to sleep disruption and a diet of processed food, modern life often clashes with how our bodies and brains are wired. Today's youth are overstimulated, undernourished and deeply disconnected."

According to Tan, while more young people are speaking out, visibility is still unequal.

"Stigma silences many, especially those from marginalised, rural or stateless communities who have limited access to care," she stressed.

Sanctuary and springboard

In this challenging landscape, Nyawa aims to be a safe space and a launchpad for change.

"Nyawa is my voice and everyone's voice," said Nayli.

"It's a space where stories and struggles converge to create collective hope," she added.

Farihin Ufiya described Nyawa as "fast-paced, creative and youth-driven", while Tan highlighted its dual mission: "We drive structural change while also offering care.

"It's where young people can question unjust systems and rethink mental health from the ground up."

> **Mental health isn't about 'curing illness'. It's about fostering wholeness.**
>
> NAYLI BISNU

One of the ways Nyawa is doing that is through youth participation in policymaking.

For decades, mental health policies were top-down and adult-driven.

But in an age where challenges like digital addiction and artificial intelligence (AI) bias directly affect young people, their exclusion is no longer viable, said Tan.

"Embedding youth participation isn't just progressive, it's essential," she emphasised.

Nyawa's policy case competitions are one example. Young participants, many without prior policy experience, have crafted real-world proposals with expert guidance.

"What stood out wasn't just the ideas: it was witnessing a self-sustaining, youth-led ecosystem in action," said Tan.

Nayli leads Nyawa's clinical and indigenous-focused initiatives.

She stressed the need for culturally-grounded mental health interventions.

Through Projek Sentosa, Nyawa works with Orang Asal and Orang Asli communities to build trust and co-create solutions.

"Indigenous youth carry strength deeply rooted in community.

"But when systems fail to reflect their realities, they often feel invisible, isolated and misunderstood," Nayli elaborated.

"We must adapt mental health models to their lives and not the other way around."

Access has improved through initiatives from NGOs and government agencies like the Orang Asli Development Department and Health Ministry.

Facilities such as the Gombak Orang Asli Hospital now provide mental health support.

Yet significant gaps persist, especially in remote areas.

"What we need is sustained, culturally respectful collaboration, where policy, practice and lived realities intersect," said Nayli.

Another key element of Nyawa's approach is holistic care.

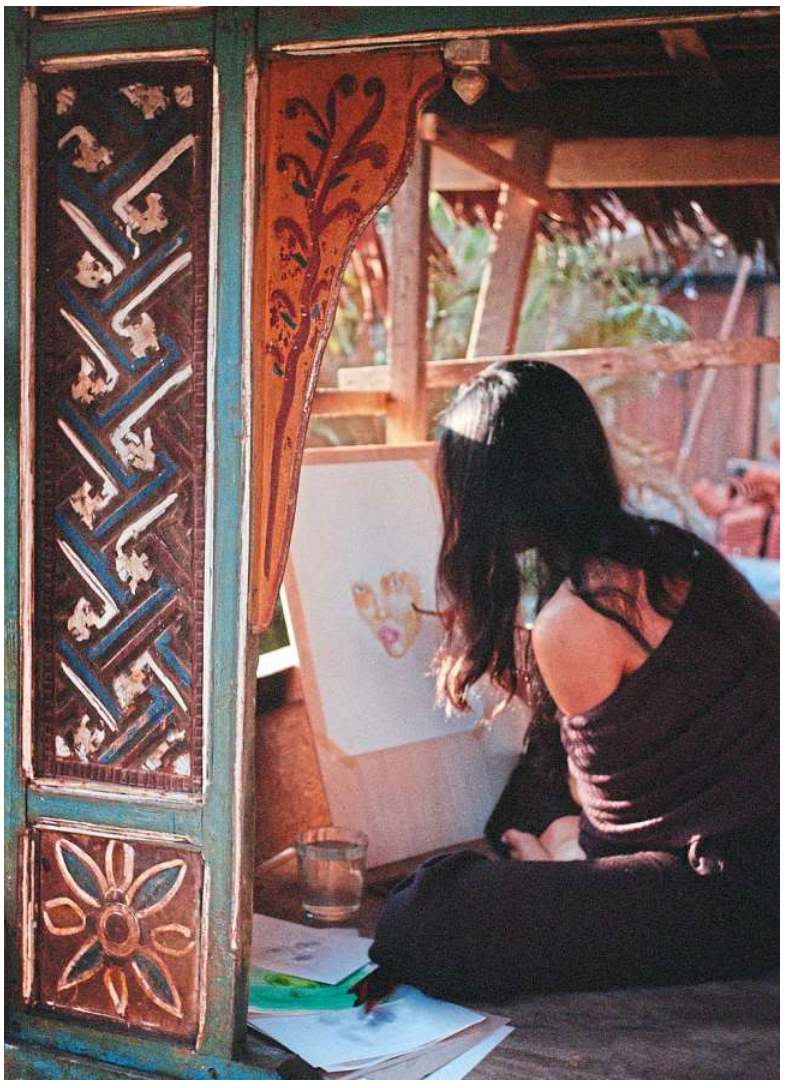
Its Sepi Studio project – an art therapy studio – centres on non-verbal healing through art, movement and creative expression.

"Mental health isn't about 'curing illness'. It's about fostering wholeness," Nayli said.

She recalled a participant who had been through years of therapy but only found clarity through art.

"Sepi Studio allows them to access emotions that even words and psychology couldn't reach. Healing comes not from fixing, but from expressing."

This emphasis on diverse healing methods is especially relevant for a generation navigating constant digital noise and performance anxiety.



(From top) Nyawa's mental health policy case competition, held in 2023 and currently on hold due to lack of funding; an art therapy session at Sepi Studio. — Pictures courtesy of Nyawa Organisation

Freedom to heal

Nyawa's outlook for the next five years is both bold and grounded.

"I hope we move past the idea that there's only one right way to heal," said Nayli.

"Healing can take many forms – through talk, art, movement and community."

She dreams of a Malaysia where mental health support is diverse, accessible and free from shame.

Tan envisions mental health being integrated into every aspect of life.

"It shouldn't sit in isolation; it should shape how we design society," she opined.

"Whether in education, climate policy or the justice system, mental health must be central."

Technology, often viewed as a double-edged sword, is embraced by Farihin Ufiya.

"AI isn't a threat – it can be a tool for deeper connection. When used ethically, it can reduce administrative burdens and give clinicians more time for human connection and care.

"This National Day, let's celebrate not just our freedom as a nation, but the freedom young Malaysians are creating every day – the freedom to feel, speak, heal and lead," she said.

Two cultures, **one table**

Food is a bridge in this household, where traditions blend and are celebrated.

By STEPHANIE LEE
stephanielee@thestar.com.my

EVERY Friday, the dining table at this home in Penampang, Sabah, is set with banana leaf plates and delicious servings of a variety of vegetables, curries and condiments.

For this family, a beautiful blend of individuals from different races and religions, it is time for their weekly vegetarian *thali*, or best described as Indian tapas – a variety of dishes served together in portions.

Their chef is Kadazan and Catholic homemaker Jessy Audrine Annabelle, 37, who learnt the art of Indian cooking from her Hindu in-laws.

"Prior to marrying my husband, I'd only had chicken and fish curries.

"After we got married, I came to learn about other types of curries such as turkey berry curry, *murungay* and beetroot curry," she recalled.

Her 10-year-old daughter Samara Evarani Koginavaan especially loves the *vadai* and *idiyappam* her paternal grandmother – whom she calls Nana – makes.

She also enjoys her mother's native Kadazan dishes such as *hinava* (lime-pickled fish with ginger, onions and, sometimes, bittergourd).

Vadai or *vada* is a savoury South Indian snack made from soaked and ground lentils or other legumes, shaped into a doughnut or patty and deep-fried.

Meanwhile, *idiyappam* consists of rice flour pressed into noodles, laid into a flat disc-like shape and steamed.

"Our favourite is all of my mother-in-law's curry dishes," said Jessy. While she has tried to learn some dishes, she said they could never compare to what her mother-in-law made.

Her husband Sen Nathan, a veterinarian, is immensely proud of his wife for being able to accept and integrate these cultural differences into her life.

"Jessy wasn't familiar with Indian cooking at first, and understandably so. But through patience and shared love, something beautiful happened," he said.

Diversity, served hot

(Clockwise)
Sen, Jessy and Samara taking a family photograph in church.

Some of the sumptuous Indian dishes prepared by Jessy.

Some of Sen's favourite Kadazan food.

"My mother took the time to teach her the finer points of Indian cuisine.

"Today, Jessy prepares Indian dishes so well, some would say she outshines many Indian women in the kitchen."

Sen enjoys a variety of native cuisines, from the spicy *sayur campur* (mix vegetables), *lada putih* (white chili) and *losun* (a mix of wild spring onions, edible flower and chili) to the pungent yet irresistible fermented rice with fish or meat, known as *bosou* (or *nonsom*).

Jessy jokes that Sen is now more of a Kadazan than she is, as he can even eat the more unique food combinations such as sago worms (*butod*) and *pinasakan handoi* (tadpoles cooked in tangy soup).

On other days, she cooks his preferred vegetable dishes and even makes extra so that he can share with his colleagues.

"He will request what he wants to eat and if I don't know how to make it, he'll say, 'just Google it'.

"If the taste doesn't turn out as we hope, then we'll change the ingredients for the next round," she said.

For Sen and Jessy, the blending of cultures that comes with interracial marriage has been a lovely experience.

"That's the beauty of cultural integration: it's not just about tolerance but about learning, sharing and growing together.

"In our home, we celebrate both Indian and Kadazan traditions," Sen said.

"Mixed marriages like ours are a culinary blessing; we get the best of both worlds. Our daughter, Samara, is a living example of this fusion. She's a proud child of both cultures – not only in identity but in taste."

Beyond the food, he said what mattered most was how their families have come together despite their racial and religious differences by building bridges, not walls.

"We've found laughter, love and understanding in our shared spaces. Cultural integration, when embraced with open hearts, turns diversity into strength. That is what Malaysia, a country rich in cultural and religious diversity, needs.

"This is the kind of Malaysia I believe in – one where our daughter grows up celebrating differences rather than fearing them," said Sen.

Sze Fei-Izzuddin celebrating after winning a point against Taiwan's Chen Zhi-ray-Lin Yu-chieh.

Hon Jian-Haikal after winning against Thailand's Dechapol Puavaranukroh-Kittinupong Kedren at the Malaysia Masters.

Roy King-Arif celebrating after winning a point against Denmark's Rasmus Kjaer-Frederick Sogaard.

On the field, we're all Malaysians

Sports prove a simple truth: shared dreams go a long way.

By R. KIRUBASHINI
kirubashini@thestar.com.my
Photos by IZZRAFIQ ALIAS

SPORTS unite Malaysians from all backgrounds, regardless of race or religion.

Four of the country's top badminton doubles pairs are among those who have shown that race and religion are not barriers to achieving success.

They are men's doubles pairs Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin Rumsani, Yap Roy King-Wan Arif Wan Junaidi, Mohd Haikal Nazri-Choong Hon Jian and the women's doubles team of Pearly Tan-M. Thinaah.

World No. 3 Sze Fei-Izzuddin and world No. 2 Pearly-Thinaah are currently Malaysia's top player combos while Roy King-Arif and Hon Jian-Haikal, who are ranked No.22 and 42 respectively, are promising young rising pairs.

Speaking on partnerships with players from different races, Haikal, who hails from Kelantan, said: "We all know that Malaysia is a multiracial country and we are comfortable playing together regardless of race and religion.

"There is no racism in the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM). We train and compete together regularly.

"We all have the same spirit and we fight alongside each other for our country."

Haikal, 22, was paired with Hon Jian, 24, in 2023. The duo now have three titles to their name – the Syed Modi International, Guwahati Masters and Orleans Masters.

On his partnership with Hon Jian, Haikal said: "Since we started playing together, we have had no problems communicating.

"We speak with each other in Malay. I can also understand a bit of Mandarin.

"We have had no issues despite being of different races.

"We also enjoy having meals together. BAM will sometimes organise gatherings during festivals and we look forward to joining and celebrating together," added Haikal.

Roy King, who is from Johor, is also happy with his partnership with Terengganu-born Arif.

Roy King-Arif initially needed some time to get to know each other when they first teamed up in 2023.

Now, they are very much in sync and even like to joke with each other in Mandarin.

"Arif cannot speak Mandarin well but he can understand the language. Sometimes, we joke together in Mandarin," said Roy King.

Reflecting on their journey, he said: "Initially, we needed some time to get to know each other.

"It was a bit hard to communicate at first but day by day, it became easier as I got to know him.

"We speak mostly in Malay and sometimes in Mandarin. We are comfortable with each other.

"During Chinese New Year and Hari Raya, we wish each other and our families.

"Arif will also jokingly ask for *ang pow* from my father," Roy King said.

The 24-year-old has a message for other young athletes.

"Sports bring us together regardless of race and religion.

"We are Malaysians and we need to stick together," he said.

"We need to have this mindset from young.

"Every race has its strengths.

"Having players of different races partnering in doubles is unique in our country and makes us stronger," added Roy King.

Both Hon Jian-Haikal and Roy King-Arif will be keen to emulate Sze Fei-Izzuddin, who have gone through thick and thin together to rise to No.1 in the world in May this year.

Sze Fei and Izzuddin started playing together in 2016 and initially struggled for a breakthrough, before capturing the German Open title in 2022.

The pair decided to split in 2023, citing a lack of trust, but resolved their differences quickly that same year and went on to win a few lower tier titles.

Their partnership really caught fire last year when they decided to leave BAM and turn independent.

Sze Fei-Izzuddin captured the Japan Open in their last tournament as BAM players and went on to triumph in the China Open and Arctic Open.

The duo also qualified for the prestigious season-ending World Tour Finals last December and finished runners-up in the tourney.

Sze Fei-Izzuddin won the Indian Open in January and moved up one rung to the coveted No.1 spot for the first time in their careers.

The pair have proven that their different races and trials and tribulations in their sporting journey have not stopped them from logging big achievements on the badminton court.

In the women's doubles, Pearly-Thinaah are another combination that reflects Malaysia's unique multicultural society.

The pair met while studying in Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS) and have been close friends ever since.

Thinaah's ability to converse in Mandarin fluently made it easy for her and Pearly to click both on and off court.

The 27-year-old Thinaah is also fluent in English, Malay and Tamil and being multilingual helps her switch between different languages when communicating with Pearly during tournaments.

"Thinaah was my first friend in BJSS. I was a shy person when I joined BJSS but Thinaah was really friendly and we quickly became close," said Pearly.

"Our friendship is definitely a great asset to our partnership. We talk a lot about life and our goals outside the courts too.

"On court, we have full confidence in each other," she said.

Thinaah rejoined: "I speak English, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin. On court, when the rally is going on, I think I speak Mandarin more with Pearly.

"But during the intervals between games, when we are discussing our next moves, I'll speak a mix of three languages: English, Malay and Mandarin.

"Of course, when we are tired, we don't know what language we are going to use. It just comes out and thankfully, she understands what I say."

On court, Pearly-Thinaah have achieved several firsts for Malaysia. The pair created history last August in the Paris OIympics when they became the first Malaysians to reach the women's doubles semi-finals in the Olympics.

In 2022, Pearly-Thinaah were also the first women's doubles duo from the country to capture the French Open title.

They were also the first Malaysians to win the Hong Kong Open last year and Thailand Open crowns in the women's doubles.

Pearly-Thinaah taking a wefie with fans after beating Japan's Rena Miyaura-Ayako Sakuramoto in the second round of the Malaysia Masters in 2024.

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