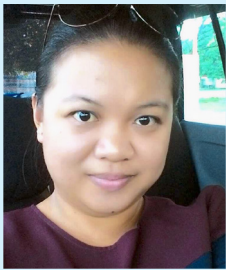




To me, Merdeka means experiencing freedom from any form of colonisation, to think freely and to carry out any economic activity without hindrance. In other words, Merdeka provides the opportunity for ordinary Malaysians like myself to get ahead in life. My hope is that Malaysians of all races and faiths will strengthen our unity so that it will never be possible for our country to be colonised in any way again.

Salma Marail, 52, Orang Sungei housewife
Pulau Banggi in Kudat



Independence is when Malaysians of any community, faith and economic background get unhindered access to education opportunities, healthcare and jobs. In other words, Merdeka should mean opportunities for Malaysians to live their lives as they see fit. There is freedom to decide where their lives will take them. My hope that the country will continue to become a better home for all Malaysians.

Frecynthia Ruji, 28, a Murut teacher from
Keningau



Independence to me means Malaysians are free of any prejudices about each other. It is not simply a day to wave the Jalur Gemilang but also a time to think rationally without hurting the nation or ourselves. Independence is also when Malaysians fully understand that we belong to this country. It is our responsibility to take care of it in whatever way we can. And that is my hope – that Malaysians appreciate this nation even more for what it has done for them and we care for it in return.

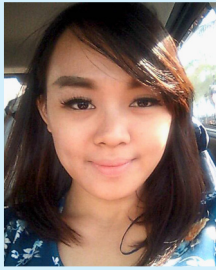
Jocelyn Sumping, 29, a Kadazan civil
servant from Penampang



To me, Merdeka means freedom of speech and religion as well as freedom from colonial masters. It means we can determine our own future and because of that, we have been able to progress and developed. Unity and harmony are very important in our daily lives. Without unity, we can't work together to make the country a safe and peaceful place for us to live in. I hope Malaysia will continue to be more harmonious and inclusive.

Syed Mohd Shukri, 22, retail associate of
Iban-Lakiput ethnicity

United as Anak-Anak M'sia



To me, Merdeka is freedom for Malaysians to make their own choices to get ahead in life. It is important that we can make such decisions; whether they are living in towns or remote villages like Pitas (in northern Sabah) where I come from. My hope is that there will be more development and job opportunities for the poorer and remote areas of Sabah like my native district.

"Martha Martin, 29, Kimaragang Dusun
retail supervisor from Pitas



Independence is a true love for the country which one can never betray. It is very important to respect, trust and have high tolerance among the races. I hope to see the future generation having such qualities. That is true independence which will see the country grow under one strong 'Bangsa Malaysia' umbrella.

Tia Ai Yin, 33, mother of three and former
teacher



Malaysia is unique because we have a lot of ethnic groups, especially in Sarawak, and yet we can all live together without racial boundaries. Sarawak is a good role model for the rest of the country. Here in Kuching, for example, we can sit down together in a coffeeshop with friends from other races and religions. We must be tolerant and learn to understand and respect each other's culture and religion in order to live in harmony.

Helen Kuan, 20, Bidayuh-Chinese sales
assistant



Merdeka is a good reminder to all Malaysians to treasure our Independence. It's also an important reminder of the love, sacrifices and unity among all races. Unfortunately the unity and tolerance had deteriorated while we are becoming less tolerant of other races. What I sincerely hope is that all leaders, be it political parties or NGOs play their role in uplifting the current unity level to what it was during the time of Independence. The racial card should not be played at all under any circumstances.

Datuk Dr Seri Dr Kuljit Singh, 86



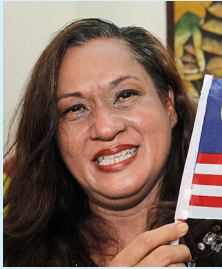
It's important for unity and harmony to prevail among Malaysians of all races. Sarawakians are a good example of this. I'm proud to be a Malaysian and I hope Malaysia will continue to progress and remain peaceful and build on the foundation of unity and harmony. I also hope to see Sarawak become more developed within Malaysia.

Merylene Lindan, 36, Iban police officer



The Portuguese are thankful to be respected as a community and to be given bumiputra status. Our country is blessed with a rich culture and tradition. There are hundreds of words borrowed from the Portuguese language (apart from Sanskrit) in Bahasa Malaysia. The Portuguese folk music of Branyo and Mata Kantiga have also become part of the Malaysian culture. This is the uniqueness and beauty of our nation. Politically, we are facing challenges but as Malaysians, we must continue with our prayers that these problems can be resolved amicably for the greater good of our country.

Joseph Sta Maria, Portugese Settlement
community leader in Malacca



I pray that Malaysia will continue to progress, ensuring a good future and comfortable home for the younger generation. The family will dress up in our traditional Portuguese outfits and go around waving the Jalur Gemilang as our way to celebrate Merdeka.

Mary Gerardine Carlos, 56, retired
singer with mixed Spanish, Portuguese,
Chinese and Anglo-Indian ancestry



Merdeka is a time to remember the struggles of our forefathers and former leaders who brought us to where we are today. Unity is something that I hold on to strongly. This is our strength and should be preserved. We are all Malaysians and we should live together as one. We all want the best for our country, not just in terms of unity but also the economy and welfare.

Joel Pengiran Ejau, 24, Kelabit student
from Lun Bawang



Merdeka is an important celebration. The unity that we have is the very core of the nation's secret to success. My hope is that for Malaysia to become the epitome of what a multi-racial country should and can be. There should always be respect and tolerance for all races and religion. For those who love playing the racial card, they must know that Malaysians do not want to fall victim to such a political saga.

Teacher V. Mohan Raj, 52,