



Farah Idayu bt Sirajadden, 12
“I attended the Merdeka parade once ... it was fun! There were so many people there!”



Arunan Ramu, 10
“Merdeka Day reminds us that we are free from colonisation.”



Muhammaad Daniel Ilhan, 10
“Merdeka means we are free from the British!”



M. Danial Fitri Rozaidi, 10
“Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka! I like it because I can shout ‘Merdeka’.”



Zachary Ong, 11
“My parents will put up flags all over the house, but not on the car because my father won't allow it. This is why I enjoy Merdeka Day, we get to wave the flags!”



Ashley Jaswant Singh, 12
“I like Merdeka Day because I get to see a lot of *Jalur Gemilang* on the cars and buildings.”



Nurhan Azhairi Mulyanto, 10
“We need to celebrate Merdeka Day because it's a way of showing appreciation to those who fought for independence. I want to be a soldier when I grow up so that I can protect the country like how those people did in the past.”

Voices of our children

MANY a time we have heard our children say the darnedest things. We got our reporters to ask the little citizens of Malaysia what they know of Merdeka Day. This is what they had to say.

Hemavatee a/p Sivagnanasingam, 16

“It's all about freedom; freedom in thoughts, freedom in action ... but of course, they must all be done responsibly.”

Neshawn, 11

“It's a happy day because it means that we are free from the world war. My mother will make Merdeka-themed cakes every year and my father will bring my siblings and I to the museum to show us the old things.”

Young Khai Yee, 16

“It is a memorable day because it is one of the few events where we can see all races unite for one reason. It's quite impressive actually.”

Kausaliya Prakasrao, 12

“I always look forward to the celebration during the Merdeka month. My school will have games, quizzes and performances so the celebration becomes more exciting.”

Anis Syawalni bt Shamsudin, 9

“I heard the word ‘Merdeka’ from the radio. I don't know the meaning (of Merdeka), but I like it because it's ‘best’ and I can see a lot of flags on the cars.”

Thuga Suseelian, 12

“Merdeka Day is the birthday of our Father of Independence.”

Nur Fidatul, 10

“31 August! Merdeka! I love singing along to the Merdeka song.”

Ong Gaik Yian, 11

“What I understand from Merdeka Day is that it is a celebration of freedom from the British.”

Tan Wei Chin, 15

“Merdeka Day is the joy of gaining independence. Although it (Merdeka Day) leaves no impact on me, I think we should celebrate it to feel the freedom of being a free country and feel grateful that we're no longer colonised.”

Thiviyah Sathish, 11

“I'm going to Stadium Merdeka this year. It's my first time there. I hope there will be performances or parade, then I can sing along.”

Karthikgesu Gopal, 11

“It means August 31. I know because I can hear people shouting Merdeka! Merdeka! on television and radio.”

Chew Ken Joo, 14

“My teacher told us that celebrating Merdeka Day is important. But if you ask me personally, I'm not sure why we need to celebrate it. What I know is that Merdeka means our country is free from the British.”



Amirul Shafiq Abdullah, 11



Nur Izni Jaafar, 12
“Merdeka means ... we are free! That's what we learn in school. It means we are free from wars.”



Nicole Bernadette, 16
“I don't do anything special on this day but I always look forward to the Merdeka month as I enjoy singing all the patriotic songs in school with my friends.”



Goh Wen Wei, 9
“Hari Merdeka is a day to celebrate Malaysia's birthday.”

“I'm excited to celebrate the Merdeka Day! I can't wait to wave the flags and help my father put up the flags on the car.”

— Amirul Shafiq

Ryan Luke Chew, 12

“Merdeka Day means happiness because everyone is celebrating it. The best thing is I get to see fireworks. I like to watch the Merdeka parade and I really wish I can join it. Too bad my house is far from Dataran Merdeka so I don't have the chance to do so.”

Mohd Ruhall, 11

“I like going to Dataran Merdeka during Merdeka Day because like last year, I get to meet friends from other schools whom I've not met for a long time. At home, my family buys flags to decorate the trees. I think it's to remind us that we have freedom now.”

Lavenya Silvam, 8

“Merdeka is our flag, it's 31 August. I know how to draw our flag. I also know it's called *Jalur Gemilang*. I like Merdeka

Day because everyone will be there to celebrate.”

Chong Wen Hui, 7

“I like it a bit. I'm not sure what it is (Merdeka) but I've heard of it from my teacher before.”

Chong Wen Hao, 15

“Merdeka Day means we celebrate Malaysia Day. It's to let people remember that we are now independent. Honestly, I've no feelings but I sing along and still join the activities organised in school.”

Sonia Yeoh Wei Lynn, 11

“My school has a drawing competition. I drew Petronas Twin Towers and *Jalur Gemilang*. I don't know why we must celebrate (Merdeka Day) but I know it is on 31 August. If possible, I hope to watch the Merdeka Parade this year.”

Endangered pre-independence villages of Penang

THERE are a number of pre-independence settlements in the country which have survived quietly. However, in Penang, century-old Kampung Francis Xavier, two-century-old Kampung Tanjung Tokong and 80-year-old Taman Boundary 5 are disappearing due to development. The residents tell *theSun* that while they welcome positive changes, they yearn for their villages to remain standing.

“We want a balanced form of development. For example, there are several historical institutions at Kg Tanjung Tokong such as the Tanjung Tokong Madrasah. Don't tell me they have to be eliminated,” said Mohd Salleh Yahaya, a resident of the endangered Kg Tanjung Tokong.

“The wishes of the kampung people towards Independence during 1957 when they gathered at the Kg Tanjung Tokong Madrasah were, ‘Allah save a free Malaya.’”

A former teacher, Salleh heads the Foundation to Defend the Living Heritage of Kg Tanjung Tokong.

Kg Tanjung Tokong existed as a fishing settlement even before the British colonialists first landed in Penang in 1786.

Salleh is worried that more than 1,000 families would be affected by the development, with descendants of a dozen original settlers from 200 years ago also likely to be uprooted.

The original settlers were fishermen and the interesting thing is that there is a special fishing technique that made these fishermen stand out.

“The unique Kg Tanjung Tokong style of fishing made the kampung a famed fishing village in Malaya. We even had a unique technique for deep-sea fishing which was known as Jermal,” said Salleh, suggesting

that if the place is developed, these heritage skills should be revived.

Fishing is no more the main occupation of Kg Tanjung Tokong folk and those who still do have adopted more modern fishing techniques.

Half an hour away, another group of residents of the 80-year-old pre-independence village – Taman Boundary 5 – is hoping that the village would be declared part of national heritage.

One of the remaining families there belongs to 47-year-old Santok Singh, a bank clerk and the president of the residents' association.

Santok and other residents are trying to keep the land from developers.

Taman Boundary 5 used to be a quaint and harmonious village covering 4ha in the heart of Ayer Itam. It is home to more than 70 families living in 43 houses.

The villagers comprise different races, but with a relatively bigger Sikh community.

The wooden houses there still stand as they are gated, well maintained and spacious.

The tussle with the developers started in 2004 and Santok's family is one of 30 which refused to be relocated.

“All the races had been living here peacefully like one big solid family, exactly like the 1Malaysia we are trying to promote right now,” said Santok.

“There was no crime and social problems were settled among ourselves back when the villagers were simple labourers and watchmen.”

His neighbour, Raminder Kaur, 62, recalled the times when everyone knew each other.

“We took care of each other and visited each other. Life was good,” said Raminder.

“Do not get us wrong. We are not against development. Rather we are against unfair development. I believe that in every development project, humans should be given first consideration, followed by environment and profit.

“My only hope come this Merdeka is that this kampung is liberated from this predicament. Only when we are treated fairly and justly can we say that we are merdeka,” said Santok, expressing hope that the authorities would take into account the age of the village.

While Taman Boundary 5 residents are still fighting for its survival, Kampung Francis Xavier has slowly become extinct except for the St Francis Xavier Church, which was the founding pillar.

This kampung was at one time the only Tamil Christian village in the country that is more than a century old.

Initially, it was set up to take care of the church's poor members and provide them with housing. Now, only the church still stands.

Anthony Muthu, 82, a third-generation resident, said that although the houses had been demolished, the church congregation on Sundays is made up of former villagers.

His family and other residents had to move out of the kampung recently to make way for development.

Asked how life was like before independence, Anthony said it was much simpler but better for the villagers.

Florence Silva, the only resident who managed to get an extension until the end of the year, said she remembers a time when safety was not a concern.

“Those days, young children walked to school by themselves and parents did not have to worry about kidnappings and muggings,” said Florence.



Raminder, 62, catching up with long-time neighbour Simbahawalli K. Arumugam, 58, in Kg Tanjung Tokong.



Florence living life as usual despite being the only resident in Kampung Francis Xavier.