Experts

Unique and memorable experiences of UMPSA international students during the National Day Celebration

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Each year on August 31, Malaysia celebrates Merdeka (Independence Day) as an annual event to commemorate the country's independence from British colonial rule in 1957. As the Independence Day approaches, the entire country is filled with a lively atmosphere, with the Malaysian flag, also known as Jalur Gemilang, proudly displayed everywhere. Various activities are held to honor the sacrifices of national heroes and the historical development of Malaysia. The unity of diverse ethnic groups and cultures, symbolizes the freedom and harmony enjoyed by Malaysians to this day. This vibrant celebration is also experienced by international students at Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah, providing them with unique and memorable experiences.

According to UMPSA PhD student, Ellora Priscille Ndia Ntone from Cameroon, during her nearly six years in Malaysia, she has seen that the excitement and joy of the independence celebration remain the same every year. Every corner of the streets is decorated with waving Malaysian flags, reflecting the deep appreciation Malaysians have for their Independence Day. She and her friends also participated in watching the independence parade, which included a military procession, and enjoyed various cultural and traditional performances. The spirit of tolerance and harmony among Malaysia's diverse ethnic groups in celebrating independence left an impression on her, teaching her the importance of mutual respect and valuing peace. This celebration also made her feel nostalgic for her home country, Cameroon.

On the other hand, Maryam, a UMPSA Master's student from Jordan, shared her unique experience celebrating *Merdeka* in Malaysia with her child, who studies at Taska Raudah UMPSA, in Gambang Campus. She described the festive atmosphere of Malaysia's Independence Day as very lively, experienced and enjoyed by everyone in the community. She appreciated how UMPSA involved kindergarten children in the celebration, exposing them to the joy and importance of Merdeka from a young age. She bought a Merdeka-themed outfit for her child and helped her make a Merdeka card, creating new memories together. Her child also learned the Malaysian national anthem, *"Negaraku,"* and participated in a dance for the *Merdeka* celebration. Meanwhile, Elnaz from Iran, who helped Maryam's child, also shared this experience. Together, they made Merdeka cards by drawing and coloring the Malaysian flag. This activity highlighted Malaysia as a country that celebrates Independence Day at every level, not just at a national level.

UMPSA PhD student, Ashraf A Alamen Teara from Libya, expressed how Malaysia's Independence Day brought him happiness. He considers Malaysia as his second home, and was delighted by the celebration. He and his friends were fascinated by the spirit of unity displayed by Malaysians. They witnessed how various ethnic groups; Malay, Chinese, Indian, and others, came together to celebrate and share a common identity. This gave them a valuable experience, showing that the celebration is not only about freedom but also the unity that keeps the country peaceful and happy.

The celebration and excitement of celebrating Independence Day in UMPSA were further highlighted

by the Aspirations Tour from Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) and Sambutan Amang Kemerdekaan at the Mini Stadium, UMPSA Gambang Campus. A total of 1,500 people attended Sambutan Ambang Merdeka, including international students. Abdelrahman Mohamed Farouk from Egypt, who participated in the celebration, shared that he gained many new experiences and had the opportunity to meet new students. In addition, he felt the love and patriotism for the country shared by UMPSA students. He watched various performances, such as patriotic shows, Indian dances, Chinese drumming, and Silat performances. This experience and the excitement of the celebration will be a special memory for him.



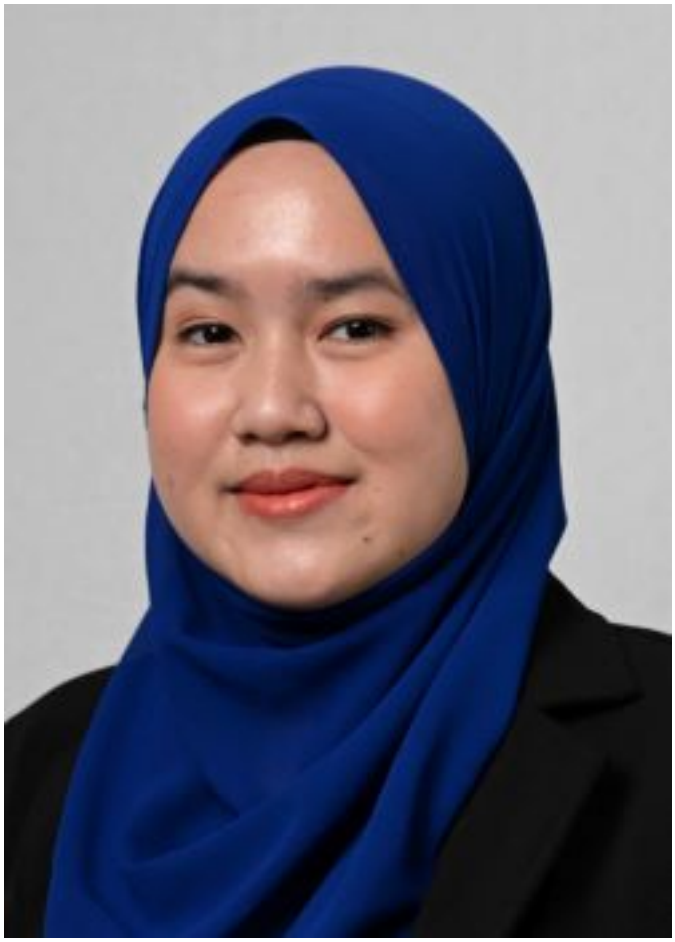
Abdelrahman Mohamed Farouk with his friends at Malam Sambutan Ambang Kemerdekaan, Mini Stadium, UMPSA Gambang Campus

In conclusion, the Independence Day celebration not only provides unique experiences for international students, but also spreads the spirit of Merdeka among them. With that, they can share ideas, understanding, and ways of celebrating Malaysia's independence with others around the world. This is because the nation's independence is not only a celebration, but also as a reminder to appreciate the freedom and peace enjoyed by everyone.

Salam Malaysia Madani: Jiwa Merdeka 2024.



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This article represents the authors' personal views and does not reflect the official position of Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA).

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