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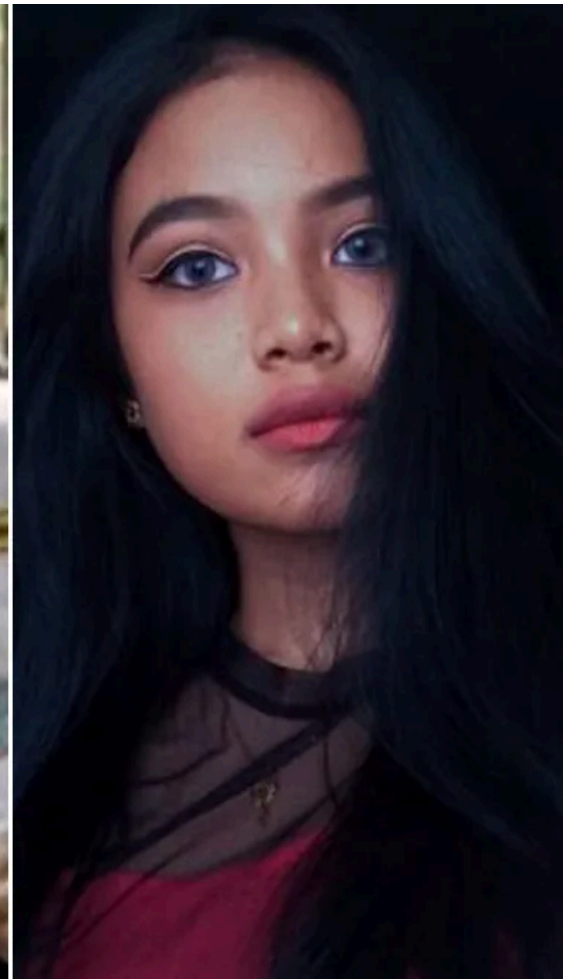
LIFESTYLE

What Merdeka Means For Former Petronas Ad Child Star Ummi Khazriena



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Whenever Merdeka Day is around, one of the first things that most Malaysians look forward to is the endless advertisements that either make us shed secret tears, grin with pride, laugh out

loud or warm our feelings.

And more often than not, we also remember and cherish the memorable advertisements that managed to capture our hearts.

One such advertisement is “**Tan Hong Ming in Love (2007)**” by Petronas, where you see shy little Tan Hong Ming professing his love for his best friend, Ummi Khazriena Skhrudin.



The charming advertisement directed by the late Yasmin Ahmad -- which showed colour-blindness in children -- together with Tan’s toothy grin and Ummi’s honest answers won Malaysians’ hearts over.

Since Merdeka Day is just around the corner, *Rojak Daily* caught up with Ummi 10 years after the ad aired, to get to know her current involvements and to hear her thoughts on National Day.

She is still colour blind

Ummi, the innocent girl who was Tan's sweetheart in primary school, is now an ambitious 17-year-old young woman.

She is currently studying in Form Five with a love for economics, geography and art.

She is also actively involved in performing arts including theatre and modern dancing, with her eyes set on moving on to Akademi Seni Budaya Dan Warisan Kebangsaan (Aswara).



Despite shedding her childhood and embracing teenage hood, the concept of colour-blindness - which was the theme of the advertisement that brought her fame - still runs deep in her.

She knows and appreciates the notion of looking beyond the racial barriers, which, for her, is something that Malaysia should reflect.

"No matter what is our skin color, no matter what is our religion, no matter what culture we are practicing, we still live in the same country, under the same roof, ruled by the same law. That is why we are called 1 Malaysia," she said.

Not just a public holiday

When it comes to the celebration of Merdeka Day, this pretty lass understands that most people her age would be looking forward to it because to them, it is just another public holiday to chill and hang out.

However, Ummi, who has a matured way of thinking, deems Merdeka Day as more than just another public holiday.

She thinks Merdeka Day is a time to reflect the beauty of the country and the multicultural society in it.



“For me, Merdeka Day is actually something very important and meaningful. This is the time of

the month when we should envelop our hearts with patriotism.

“This is the time of the month for us to show loyalty towards our country, Malaysia.

“This is the time to reflect upon such a beautiful country which consists of many different races and religion,” she pointed out.

Ummi also explained that she would usually not miss the chance to go to Dataran Merdeka on Merdeka Day to watch the colourful parade.

“Merdeka means independence, which means we are free. Everyone, including the younger generation should know and realise that it is not easy to achieve what we have now and to get where we are now.

“Merdeka is actually more than what everyone think it is. That is why we should be proud and celebrate Merdeka to the fullest.

“Everybody has something that they love about this country. For me, I absolutely love everything about Malaysia. I especially love the food and the spectacular islands,” said the *nasi lemak* lover.

Remembering Tan Hong Ming and Yasmin Ahmad

Reminiscing about the heartwarming advertisement that brought fame to her and her best friend at that time, Ummi revealed that the whole thing was unplanned and unscripted.

“It happened spontaneously. Which means, it is real. They picked Tan and Tan liked me, so they called me,” she said.

Although the both of them used to be best friends in Standard One, Ummi said later on, they were not as close as they used to be as she moved to another school when she was in Standard Four.

However, she said that does not mean that they do not meet up at all.

“Sometimes, the media people approach us for an interview session and that is how we bump into each other from time to time, and we pick up from where we left off,” she shared.



She also has nothing but good things to say about the late Yasmin Ahmad.

Despite being only seven at that time, Umami remembers the award-winning Yasmin as an intelligent and talented woman.

“She would give everything that she could in everything that she did. She was very nice to me back then.”

Whichever path that life takes her and her best friend Tan, their love story will always be a timely reminder to all Malaysians about the uniqueness of our multicultural society and the beauty of our diversity.

Selamat Hari Merdeka, fellow Malaysians!

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