



MERDEKA  
AWARD

# FOSTERING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE 2026



# 2026 MERDEKA AWARD

Founded by:



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## HONOURING THE HEROES AMONG US

SINCE 2007

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# OUR LEGACY

## 19 Years of Fostering a Culture of Excellence

Established in August 2007 by PETRONAS, ExxonMobil and Shell, the Merdeka Award Trust began with a shared belief that Malaysia's progress is shaped by individuals and organisations driven by excellence, integrity, innovation and purpose. Today, supported by PETRONAS and Shell, the Trust continues to honour contributions that have advanced the nation and enriched the lives of Malaysians.

Over the past 19 years, the Trust has recognised remarkable achievements across education, community, environmental stewardship, science, technology, academia, humanities, arts and sports. Through the Merdeka Award and Anugerah Harapan Merdeka, it celebrates both established changemakers and emerging talents whose courage, creativity and vision hold the promise of shaping Malaysia's future.

The Trust also believes that excellence must be nurtured. Through the Merdeka Award Grant for International Attachment, young Malaysians are given opportunities to collaborate with leading global institutions, broaden their knowledge and transform bold ideas into meaningful solutions for the nation. Since 2019, the presentation ceremony has been organised biennially, alternating between the Merdeka Award and the Grant to give each programme dedicated recognition.

Together, these initiatives form a continuing journey of excellence – honouring those who have shaped Malaysia's progress while empowering those who will carry it forward. Nearly two decades on, the Merdeka Award Trust remains steadfast in its aspiration of Fostering a Culture of Excellence, inspiring generations of Malaysians to contribute towards a stronger and brighter nation.

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES



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Chairman Board of  
Trustee



**Puan Siti Hurrairah  
Sulaiman**

Board of Trustee



**Professor Datin  
Paduka Dr  
Khatijah Mohamad  
Yusoff**

Independent Board  
of Trustee



"The strength of a nation is built not only through its institutions and resources, but through the knowledge, character and contributions of its people. The Merdeka Award celebrates Malaysians who embody the spirit of excellence, service and innovation – individuals whose dedication has enriched our society and whose achievements continue to inspire future generations to contribute towards the progress of our nation."

**HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS SULTAN NAZRIN MUIZZUDDIN SHAH IBNI  
ALMARHUM SULTAN AZLAN MUHIBBUDDIN SHAH AL-MAGHFUR-LAH**

D.K., D.K.S.A., D.K.A., D.M.N., D.K. (Kelantan), D.K.(Selangor), D.K.N.S., D.K.(Perlis),  
D.K.(Kedah), D.K.1 (Johor), D.K. (Pahang), PhD (Harvard)

**The Sultan of Perak Darul Ridzuan  
Royal Patron and Chairman of the Merdeka Award Trust**





PETRONAS

“

For almost 20 years, the Merdeka Award Trust has honoured individuals and organisations whose ideas, achievements and contributions have strengthened our nation and enriched its people. PETRONAS is humbled to have played a part in establishing the Trust as one of its founding members. By recognising and celebrating these outstanding feats by our fellow compatriots, the Board remains committed to nurturing a legacy of excellence that will continue benefitting Malaysia for generations to come.

”

**Merdeka Award Board of Trustees**

Tan Sri Tengku Muhammad Taufik  
President and Group CEO,  
PETRONAS and Founding Member,  
Merdeka Award Trust



“

The Merdeka Award represents a shared belief that progress is driven by individuals who have the courage to challenge boundaries and create positive change. As a founding partner, Shell remains committed to supporting a platform that celebrates Malaysian excellence, encourages innovation and recognises contributions that make a lasting difference to society.

”

**Merdeka Award Board of Trustees**

Puan Siti Hurrairah Sulaiman  
Country Chair and Senior Vice President,  
Upstream, Shell Malaysia and Founding  
Member, Merdeka Award Trust



# MAKING OUR MARK

The Merdeka Award is presented in recognition of individuals and organisations whose exceptional contributions have created meaningful and lasting impact towards the betterment of Malaysia and its people. The Award celebrates the strength of human potential, the pursuit of excellence and the courage to realise bold and transformative ideas through dedication, perseverance and sustained achievement. It is this remarkable spirit that continues to inspire individuals and institutions to deliver outstanding contributions consistently over time.

Now in its 15<sup>th</sup> edition, the Merdeka Award continues to champion a culture of excellence by promoting thought leadership, innovation and a progressive global outlook. Through recognising exemplary achievements across diverse fields ranging from science and technology to education, community, environment, health, arts and culture, the Award aspires to strengthen Malaysia's standing as a dynamic, forward-looking and globally competitive nation.



## MERDEKA AWARD TROPHY

Designed by Allahyarham Dato' Johan Arif

- The trophy is a three-dimensional version of the Merdeka Award logo.
- It expresses convergence and ascension; the same qualities celebrated in the achievements of the Merdeka Award winners.
- The trophy is built using Lapis Lazuli gemstone as its base, with elements of gold, silver, Malaysian pewter and Malaysian hardwood, Chengal.

# AWARDS CATEGORIES



## Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose significant, sustained, innovative and meaningful contributions or service in the field of education and/or community have made a lasting different to the lives of Malaysians and continue to benefit Malaysian society.



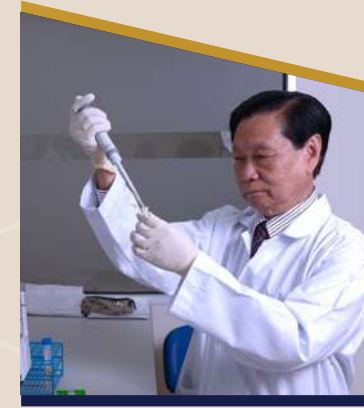
## Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose significant and meaningful contributions, whether through research, management or practice, have advanced the safeguard, protection, restoration, conservation or enhancement of the environment and planetary health, creating lasting benefits for present and future generations.



## Outstanding Contribution to Humanities, Arts & Sports

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose significant and meaningful contributions in the fields of the humanities, the arts and sports have enriched Malaysia's cultural and social landscape. This category honours those whose outstanding achievements in music, literature, the visual and performing arts, fine arts or sports have advanced artistic and sporting excellence, strengthened Malaysia's cultural identity, inspired generations of Malaysians, bringing distinction to the nation on the global stage.



## Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose meaningful and impactful contributions in the field of science, technology and innovation have advanced knowledge, driven discovery and fostered the innovative application of technology for the public good. This category honours achievements across research, scientific discovery and technological innovation that have created lasting value for Malaysia.



## Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement

Presented to the most deserving Malaysian whose outstanding scholarship and academic excellence have advanced the pursuit of knowledge and contributed to significant discoveries, whether pure, applied or emerging. This category honours scholars, researchers and academicians whose work, which may also cover the social sciences such as sociology, economics, history and geography, has shaped intellectual thought and advanced their respective disciplines.



## Anugerah Harapan Merdeka

Presented as a special honour to the most deserving candidate, Malaysian or international, whose extraordinary contributions have profoundly advanced Malaysia and enriched the lives of its people. This category recognises achievements of exceptional significance that have delivered lasting improvements to the nation's well-being and quality of life, leaving an enduring legacy for generations to come.



## Anugerah Khas Merdeka

Recognises aspiring and promising young individuals and organisations whose excellence, innovation and impactful contributions have demonstrated exceptional potential to shape Malaysia's future. This category honours emerging changemakers across Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community, Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health, Outstanding Contribution to Humanities, Arts & Sports and Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation, whose achievements inspire progress and contribute meaningfully to the nation.

# 2026 SELECTION COMMITTEE



**Professor Dato' Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman**



**Professor Dr Abhimanyu Veerakumarasivam**



**Professor Tan Sri Dr Ghauth Jasmon**



**Dato' Kathleen Chew**



**Emeritus Professor Dr Ng Kwan Hoong, FASc**

## SELECTING THE BEST

The nomination and selection of Merdeka Award recipients are entrusted to six Nomination Committees and one Selection Committee, established to uphold the integrity, prestige and distinguished standing of the Award.

Comprising eminent Malaysian and international figures, the committees undertake a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation of each nominee's achievements, impact, character, vision and enduring legacy. Their collective expertise and careful deliberation ensure that every selection reflects the highest standards of diligence, integrity and discernment.

Through this distinguished process, the Merdeka Award Trust honours individuals and organisations whose exceptional dedication and meaningful contributions have advanced Malaysia and enriched the lives of its people. Their achievements embody the spirit of Merdeka – leadership, perseverance, innovation and an enduring commitment to building a better nation.

## NOMINATION COMMITTEE

The Merdeka Award is supported by six Nomination Committees, each overseeing a specific Award category and comprising respected Nominators with relevant expertise. Entrusted with a vital role in the selection process, the committees identify and assess individuals and organisations whose achievements demonstrate excellence, leadership and meaningful service to Malaysia.

Through careful deliberation, members evaluate the impact, significance and enduring value of each nomination before recommending a shortlist to the Selection Committee for final consideration. This rigorous process reflects the Merdeka Award Trust's commitment to integrity, discernment and recognising those whose contributions create lasting benefit for the nation and its people.

## SELECTION COMMITTEE

Comprising five distinguished Nominators, the Selection Committee safeguards the integrity and prestige of the Merdeka Award by conducting a rigorous and impartial review of shortlisted candidates. Guided by the ideals of the Merdeka Award Trust, the Committee identifies individuals and organisations whose excellence, leadership, innovation and service have created enduring value for Malaysia, before submitting its final recommendations to the Board of Trustees for endorsement.

# 2026 NOMINATION COMMITTEE

**Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community**



**Chen Li Kai**



**Farahida Mohd Farid**



**Sumitra Visvanathan**



**YM Tengku Nurul Azian Tengku Shahrman**

**Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health**



**Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor, FASc**



**Datin Seri Sunita Rajakumar**



**Sophia Lim**

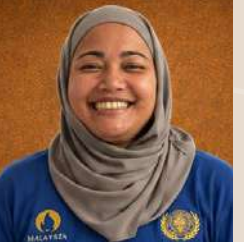
**Outstanding Contribution to Humanities, Arts & Sports**



**Dato' Dr Faridah Merican**



**Eddin Khoo**



**Datuk Shalin Zulkifli**

**Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation**



**Distinguished Professor Datuk Dr Looi Lai Meng, FASc**



**Dato' Dr Gan Ee Kiang**



**Professor Dato' Ir Ts Dr Mohamed Ibrahim bin Abdul Mutalib**

**Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement**



**Emeritus Professor Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram**



**Distinguished Professor Ulung Datuk Dr Harith Ahmad, FASc**



**Emeritus Professor Dato' Dr Siti Zuraina binti Abdul Majid, FASc**

**Anugerah Khas Merdeka**



**Professor Dato' Dr Elizabeth Lee**



**Datuk Dr Glen Reynolds**



**Dato' Ho Kay Tat**



MERDEKA  
AWARD

2026  
RECIPIENTS

2026 RECIPIENTS

2026 RECIPIENTS



**Outstanding  
Contribution  
to Education  
& Community**

MERCY  
Malaysia



**Outstanding  
Contribution to  
Environment &  
Planetary Health**

Professor Dr  
Chan Eng Heng



**Outstanding  
Contribution  
to Humanities,  
Arts & Sports**

Datuk Nicol  
Ann David



**Outstanding  
Scholastic  
& Academic  
Achievement**

Emeritus  
Professor Dato'  
Dr Hajah Asmah  
Haji Omar



**Outstanding  
Contribution  
to Science,  
Technology &  
Innovation**

Academician  
Emeritus  
Professor Datin  
Paduka Setia  
Dato' Dr Aini  
Ideris  
(Joint Recipient)



**Outstanding  
Contribution  
to Science,  
Technology &  
Innovation**

Academician  
Professor Emerita  
Datuk Dr  
Asma Ismail  
(Joint Recipient)



**Anugerah  
Khas Merdeka**

Academician  
Professor  
Emeritus Tan Sri  
Datuk Dr Omar  
Abdul Rahman



**Anugerah  
Harapan  
Merdeka**

Cheah Liek Hou



## OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION & COMMUNITY

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose significant, sustained, innovative and meaningful contributions or service in the field of education and/or community have made a lasting different to the lives of Malaysians and continue to benefit Malaysian society.

2026  
RECIPIENT



MERCY  
Malaysia



Kosovo Humanitarian Mission in 2019, where our humanitarian journey began.

## Serving Humanity, Strengthening Communities

In 1999, as conflict and displacement engulfed Kosovo, a small group of Malaysian doctors and volunteers made their way to the Balkans to help. They were far from home, with no large humanitarian organisation behind them. What they brought were their professional skills, compassion and a conviction that would come to define their work when people are in need, assistance should reach them regardless of race, religion, nationality or political affiliation. That first mission was the beginning of the Malaysian Medical Relief Society or better known as MERCY Malaysia.

Twenty-seven years later, MERCY Malaysia has undertaken more than 500 missions

across over 35 countries, responding to disasters, conflicts, disease outbreaks and displacement while helping communities prepare for future risks. The scale of that journey makes MERCY Malaysia's receipt of the 2026 Merdeka Award for Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community especially significant. Yet the organisation sees the honour not simply as recognition of what it has achieved, but as a responsibility to keep serving. It shares the recognition with the volunteers, staff, donors, partners and above all, with the communities that have placed their trust in MERCY Malaysia at some of the most difficult moments of their lives.



Responding to the Pakistan Earthquake Crisis in 2005.

## From Kosovo to a Global Humanitarian Presence

MERCY Malaysia's early years were shaped by some of the region's most devastating emergencies. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was one such moment. MERCY Malaysia was among the earliest international humanitarian organisations to reach Aceh, where the scale of devastation demanded both urgency and staying power.

It subsequently responded to the 2005 Nias-Simeulue earthquake and established a field hospital after the Kashmir earthquake. They supported flood-affected communities in Pakistan, assisted victims of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake in Japan, worked with Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan and responded to the 2015 Nepal earthquake.

Its approach has also been guided by knowing when partnerships may be more effective than direct deployment. Following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, MERCY Malaysia chose to support Medical Emergency Relief International in delivering assistance rather

than duplicating efforts already underway, a reflection of an approach that places need ahead of visibility.

Closer to home, the organisation has responded repeatedly to major Malaysian floods. During the 2021 floods in Pahang, Melaka and Kelantan, its recovery programmes helped rebuild 82 homes and restore access to clean water for more than 1,000 people.

This ability to respond across very different settings rests on the relationships and trust they have built over time. When a major earthquake struck Mandalay, Myanmar, in March 2025, MERCY Malaysia was able to deploy within 48 hours, supported by its permanent presence in Yangon since 2008 and longstanding relationships with local authorities. In 2026, its humanitarian work continued in Lebanon, providing emergency medical assistance alongside food aid and water, sanitation and hygiene support.



WHO EMT Type 1 fixed verification in 2023, a milestone in humanitarian excellence.



Gaza Emergency Response, "Standing with Gaza", 2023–present.



Integrated Life-Saving Services for Maternal and Child Health in Sudan, 2026.



Pakistan Earthquake Relief Mission in 2025.

## Where the Need is Greatest

Some of MERCY Malaysia's most demanding work has unfolded in places where conflict, displacement and damaged infrastructure make delivering even basic healthcare extraordinarily difficult.

In Gaza, where MERCY Malaysia has maintained a humanitarian presence since 2009, the scale of need has intensified significantly. In 2024 alone, RM24.25 million was channelled towards its response, reaching more than 130,000 people with healthcare, clean water and essential relief. Medical points and specialised medical teams delivered more than 26,000 primary healthcare services and over 5,000 specialised interventions, alongside broader health, water, food security and shelter programmes.

Elsewhere, during the Rohingya humanitarian crisis in Cox's Bazar in 2017 and 2018, nearly 25,000 refugees received medical and psychosocial support.

In 2023, MERCY Malaysia also mobilised significant resources following the devastating Türkiye-Syria earthquakes, delivering 4.8 tonnes of supplies and raising millions of Malaysian Ringgit to support affected communities. In 2026, it re-initiated medical services to Sudan, providing medical Integrated Life-Saving Services for Maternal and Child Health in Hayya, Red Sea State.

Working in environments such as these requires more than the willingness to help. It demands medical expertise, disciplined coordination and the ability to operate effectively when, resources and access are constrained. In 2023, that capability received international recognition when MERCY Malaysia became the first Asian non-governmental organisation to be classified by the World Health Organization as a Type 1 Fixed Emergency Medical Team. The milestone placed Malaysian humanitarian medical professionals within an internationally recognised emergency response system and affirmed that an organisation born from a small volunteer mission in Kosovo had developed capabilities that met global standards.

## Building Resilience, Not Dependency

For MERCY Malaysia, however, responding to a crisis is only part of the job. The harder question is what happens after the emergency teams leave. In 2005, it became an early adopter of Total Disaster Risk Management, linking immediate response with preparedness, recovery and long-term resilience. Through its Building Resilient Communities initiative, MERCY Malaysia has taken this thinking into disaster-prone communities across Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, helping people to recover from disasters and become better equipped for the next one.

In 2024 alone, more than 1,300 people participated in disaster risk reduction and community-based preparedness programmes, while 295 healthcare professionals and volunteers received training in emergency response, public health and disaster readiness.

The importance of this approach became particularly clear during COVID-19. MERCY Malaysia co-founded the National COVID Response Team and supported national healthcare efforts, while the Ministry of Health and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) entrusted the organisation with supporting



Supporting the nation through hospital assistance and medical equipment as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response, 2019-2021.



Providing food aid and community support, 2019-2021.



Supporting large-scale screening and testing efforts, 2019-2021.

COVID-19 testing among refugee communities. Its Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Helpline later contributed to a broader national conversation around mental health and psychosocial support.

In Malaysia, MERCY Malaysia has also worked to close the distance between healthcare and communities that struggle to access it. In 2022, its mobile clinic services in the Klang Valley supported more than 123,000 people, while outreach teams brought medical, dental and eye screening to underserved areas in Sabah.

Through Water, Sanitation and Hygiene programmes in places such as Gua Musang and Simunjan, communities were supported to manage gravity-fed filtration systems and strengthen hygiene practices. Across these efforts, clean water access has been restored for nearly 39,000 people.

The organisation's longer-term health initiatives include its Cleft Lip and Palate Project, which has supported more than 200 surgeries.

## Trust as the Measure of Service

MERCY Malaysia's reach has grown enormously over the years, but so too has the community behind it. From about 240 people in 2004, its volunteer network has expanded to more than 3,000 by 2025. Public donations and partnerships remain central to its work, reflecting a wider culture of Malaysian volunteerism and collective responsibility. That spirit of collective responsibility has sustained the organisation, enabling it to respond wherever help is needed while building the professional standards expected of an international humanitarian organisation.

Those standards have earned MERCY Malaysia recognition, including Humanitarian Accountability Partnership certification in 2007 and the Prime Minister's Innovation Award in 2013. Longstanding collaborations with organisations including WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, government agencies and corporate partners have further strengthened its ability to respond with professionalism and accountability, even in complex humanitarian settings.

For MERCY Malaysia, however, the most meaningful achievement is not the number of missions completed or resources mobilised. It is the trust earned from communities.

Its philosophy remains that people affected by crisis are not passive recipients of aid, but partners in rebuilding their lives. The organisation's role is to listen, respond with dignity and help strengthen the resilience that already exists within communities.

It is this philosophy that gives particular meaning to MERCY Malaysia's receipt of the 2026 Merdeka Award. The honour recognises a Malaysian humanitarian organisation whose journey has shown that compassion is strongest when matched with professionalism, preparedness and sustained service.

*“Be courageous in your compassion. Use your skills, knowledge and talents in service of others. Seek not only success, but significance”*



MERCY Malaysia International Humanitarian Conference - a gathering of humanitarian leaders, 2024.



Charting the future of humanitarian action.



Sharing the road ahead and programme achievements.



## OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENT & PLANETARY HEALTH

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose significant and meaningful contributions, whether through research, management or practice, have advanced the safeguard, protection, restoration, conservation or enhancement of the environment and planetary health, creating lasting benefits for present and future generations.

2026  
RECIPIENT



Professor Dr  
Chan Eng Heng

# A Lifetime Devoted to Malaysia’s Turtles

Professor Dr Chan Eng Heng never imagined that turtles would define her life’s work. Her journey began in the early 1980s at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia’s (UPM) Terengganu campus, where she was handed an unexpected request to investigate why leatherback turtle eggs were hatching so poorly.

Turtles were an entirely new field to the young fish biologist. But as she began searching for answers, another opportunity emerged. Esso Malaysia offered her funding to study the leatherbacks of Terengganu, drawing her deeper into the world of these ancient marine creatures. What began

almost by chance became a lifelong commitment that would take Professor Chan from laboratories and nesting beaches to classrooms, communities and international conservation forums.

Over the next five decades, she would become one of Malaysia’s leading voices in turtle conservation, helping to place scientific evidence at the heart of turtle conservation, while showing that protecting wildlife ultimately depends on people who care enough to act.

## When Research Became a Responsibility

Professor Chan joined UPM in 1976 as a lecturer in fish biology. Her early turtle research took her to Rantau Abang, then renowned for its leatherback population. Decades earlier, thousands of leatherbacks had returned to the coast, while large numbers of their eggs were harvested for consumption. By the 1980s, the nesting population had fallen dramatically.

It was against this backdrop that Professor Chan and her colleague, Associate Professor Liew Hock Chark began the work that would eventually lead to the establishment of the Sea Turtle Research Unit (SEATRU) in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. Together, they studied how turtles nested, hatchability eggs, population trends and the movements of turtles at sea. Their research provided evidence

for stronger protection measures, including restrictions on the sale of leatherback eggs and fishing activities around important turtle habitats.

Sadly, these interventions came to late to reverse the leatherback’s decline, and the species is now considered functionally extinct in Malaysia. For Professor Chan, however, the experience left an enduring lesson that would shape the next chapter of her work - conservation must act before decline becomes irreversible.

What they learnt at Rantau Abang would not be lost. Professor Chan and her colleague carried that knowledge forward, applying it to the conservation of green and hawksbill turtles, especially on Redang Island.



Measuring the carapace length of a post-nesting green turtle.



Releasing a head-started green turtle into the sea.



Monitoring the nesting activity of a green turtle.



Bonding with a hatchling before releasing it into the sea.



Show-casing a turtle nest undergoing in-situ incubation



Releasing hatchlings into the sea with YBhg Tan Sri Dato Seri Haji Idris Jusoh.



With volunteers and turtle camp participants at the turtle sanctuary.

## Giving Every Egg a Better Chance

At Chagar Hutang on Redang Island, Professor Chan encountered another uncomfortable reality. She and her colleague would spend nights observing and researching nesting green turtles, only to watch licensed collectors arrive the next morning to gather the eggs for sale.

It forced her to confront a fundamental question: what purpose did sophisticated research serve if the next generation of turtles could not be protected.

That question helped shift her work from studying conservation to putting it into practice. Research by her team showed that leaving eggs to incubate naturally where mother turtles had laid them could produce high hatch rates and healthier sex ratios than those relocated to conventional hatcheries. In 1993, Chagar Hutang became the site of Malaysia’s pioneering long-term in-situ marine turtle egg protection programme.

Initially, corporate funding enabled SEATRU to purchase nests from licensed collectors and engage islanders to monitor nesting

turtles. But when that support ended as a result of the Asian financial crisis, the programme faced a defining moment. Can the work continue without the funding it had relied upon?

Professor Chan found her answer in the public.

She introduced paid volunteerism, turtle and nest adoption schemes and even made turtle-themed souvenirs herself to raise funds. Volunteers helped patrol beaches, tag turtles, monitor nests and release hatchlings. What began as a funding solution evolved into something larger: ordinary people became conservation advocates.

The approach gave SEATRU greater financial independence and helped sustain its conservation work for decades. More importantly, it demonstrated an idea that would become central to Professor Chan’s work - lasting conservation could not depend on scientists alone. It needed the public to become part of the solution.



Collecting ectoparasite samples from a juvenile turtle.

## From Protection to Recovery

The results did not come quickly. But year by year, nest by nest, the impact of sustained protection began to show.

By the time Professor Chan retired in 2009, SEATRU had saved about half a million turtle eggs from human consumption and released more than 400,000 hatchlings into the sea. The work continued even after her retirement and by 2025, approximately 1.15 million hatchlings had been released on Redang Island. More telling still was what was happening back on the beach. At Chagar Hutang, where nesting numbers had once been sparse, nesting numbers rose substantially over the years. The long-term programme has contributed to a remarkable recovery at the site and demonstrated what sustained protection

over generations can achieve. Professor Chan's advocacy also helped build momentum for stronger habitat protection. Chagar Hutang was gazetted as a turtle sanctuary in 2005, followed by other important nesting beaches on Redang Island.

And the turtles themselves revealed an even bigger picture. Professor Chan and her colleagues' research on turtle migration showed that these animals recognise no national boundaries, travelling through the waters of multiple countries during their lifetime and making regional cooperation essential. This growing scientific understanding contributed to wider efforts such as the ASEAN Framework for Sea Turtle Conservation and Protection.

## Conservation Through People

For Professor Chan, protecting turtles was never just about turtles. It was about changing the way people understood and ultimately, cared for them. She brought that belief to children, establishing turtle camps on Redang Island, where young participants from the school in Redang Island could experience patrols, nesting turtles and conservation first-hand. A bedtime story she once shared with the children later became *Little Turtle Messenger*, a bilingual book introducing younger generations to the consequences of consuming turtle eggs.

In Kuala Terengganu, she transformed a neglected lane into Turtle Alley, combining mosaics, storytelling and conservation messages to bring the subject into everyday public life.

Retirement in 2009 did little to slow her down. In 2011, Professor Chan, her former student Dr Chen Pelf Nyok and associates, co-founded the Turtle Conservation Society of Malaysia, extending their efforts to endangered freshwater turtles. Its community-based programmes have since protected thousands of southern river terrapin eggs and released head-started terrapins into the Kemaman River. Local villagers - including some once involved in egg

collection – were trained to become guardians of the very nesting sites they once harvested eggs from.

Professor Chan's legacy also lives through the scientists she mentored, including Dr Chen, Associate Professor Dr Juanita Joseph and Associate Professor Dr Mohd Uzair Rusli, who have continued advancing turtle research and conservation in Malaysia.

Her contributions have received international recognition including UNEP's Global 500 Roll of Honour, listing in Who's Who of Women and the Environment, the International Sea Turtle Society Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019, recognition among Malaysia's Wiki Impact 100 Changemakers in 2022 and designation as a Living Legend of Sea Turtle Conservation in 2024.



Showing students how microchips are inserted into turtles for tracking purposes.



Relocating turtle eggs to a safer location.



With volunteers in the Edible Plant Sanctuary.



Turtle Alley, a legacy for Chinatown, Kuala Terengganu.

## A Life Still Rooted in Nature

Retirement may have taken Professor Chan away from the nesting beaches of Terengganu, but it did not end her relationship with the natural world. After returning to Kuala Lumpur, she founded the Klang Valley Plant Acquisition community, which has grown to nearly 9,000 members and later created an Edible Plant Sanctuary where she hopes to grow food, restore nature, build community and encourage more sustainable lifestyles.

At 76, her work has shifted from turtles to plants and from academic research to everyday sustainability. But the underlying belief remains unchanged: individuals can make a difference when

knowledge is accompanied by action.

Receiving the 2026 Merdeka Award for Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health is deeply meaningful to Professor Chan. She hopes the recognition brings renewed attention to Malaysia's turtles and encourages younger scientists and conservationists to continue the work.

Her journey reflects the Merdeka Award Trust's belief that enduring contribution is built not only through achievement, but through knowledge shared, communities empowered and a legacy carried forward by others.

*“Embrace opportunities and take up challenges. Get your hands dirty and doors will open for you”*



## OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO HUMANITIES, ARTS & SPORTS

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose significant and meaningful contributions in the fields of the humanities, the arts and sports have enriched Malaysia's cultural and social landscape. This category honours those whose outstanding achievements in music, literature, the visual and performing arts, fine arts or sports have advanced artistic and sporting excellence, strengthened Malaysia's cultural identity, inspired generations of Malaysians, bringing distinction to the nation on the global stage.

2026  
RECIPIENT



Datuk Nicol  
Ann David



# Excellence Beyond the Court

For Datuk Nicol Ann David, it began with something wonderfully uncomplicated, she loved to play squash.

What followed was a career that took a young girl from Penang to the highest levels of international competition, carrying Malaysia's name onto courts around the world. Yet nearly three decades after she first represented the country, Datuk Nicol's story is increasingly defined not only by what she achieved as an athlete, but by how she is using those achievements to create opportunities for others.

For Datuk Nicol, receiving the 2026 Merdeka Award for Outstanding Contribution to Humanities, Arts & Sports is deeply humbling. She never competed for awards. Her motivation was to become the best athlete she could be, represent Malaysia with pride and honour the people who supported her journey. She therefore regards the recognition as one shared with her family, coaches, teammates and Malaysians who stood behind her throughout her career.

# A Champion Shaped at Home

Datuk Nicol grew up in Penang with her parents and two older sisters in a family where sport, encouragement and humility were part of everyday life. Her mother, Ann Marie, an English teacher, showed her patience and kindness, while her father, Desmond, a former Malaysian national football goalkeeper, offered an example of commitment to sport.

At five, Datuk Nicol followed her sisters to a public squash centre. By 10, she was representing Penang and soon after, Malaysia.

At 15, she became the first Malaysian woman to win the World Junior Squash Championship. It was an early indication that an athlete from Malaysia could challenge countries with far longer traditions in the sport.

What followed would redefine the possibilities for Malaysian squash. Datuk Nicol went on to win eight World Championship titles, 81 professional titles, Commonwealth gold medals and numerous Asian titles. Most notably, she held the World No. 1 ranking for 108 consecutive months from 2006 to 2015 – nine uninterrupted years at the summit of the sport.

For Datuk Nicol, reaching the top had demanded extraordinary talent and discipline. Staying there however, would demand something more.



Winning her second World Junior Open Title at the PISA Indoor Stadium, Penang in 2001 and becoming the first player to win two consecutive World Junior titles.



Datuk Nicol and sister, Cheryl, representing the Malaysian Junior Women's team at the World Junior Women's Team Champions in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1997.

# Learning to Stay at the Top

Years of competing at the highest level brought pressure, difficult losses and moments of self-doubt. Datuk Nicol learnt that sustained excellence required more than physical talent.

Her long-time coach, former World No. 2 Liz Irving, constantly challenged her to refine her game and learn from opponents. A psychologist helped her manage expectations, emotions and negativity, while her family and support team gave her the stability to maintain balance away from competition.

Over time, Datuk Nicol learnt to see setbacks differently. A defeat was not the end of progress; it was information about what needed to improve.

Her career also widened perceptions of what Malaysian and Asian women could achieve in professional sport. Greater pathways emerged for girls in Malaysian squash, including younger competitive categories. More than 1,000 junior girls across 14 states have since gained greater access to the sport.

Datuk Nicol has also remained close to the generation that followed, encouraging athletes including Sivasangari Subramaniam, Aifa Azman and Aira Azman as they established their own international careers.



Liz Irving coaching Datuk Nicol during the 2013 US Open where she eventually won the title. Liz coached Datuk Nicol for 16 years, from 2003 until 2019.



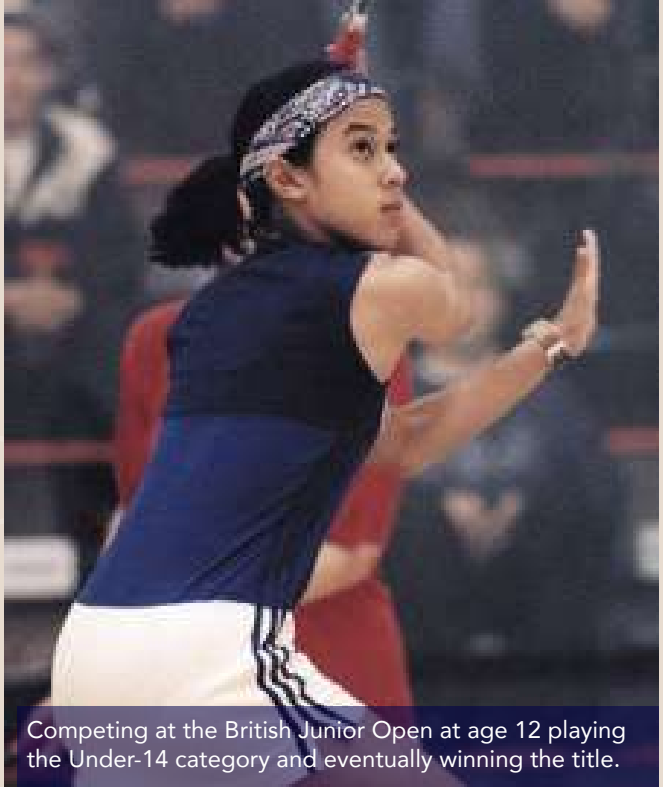
Datuk Nicol at age 14, after winning her first Asian Individual Senior Championship title in Kuala Lumpur in 1998.



Datuk Nicol won her first ever World Junior Open Title in Antwerp, Belgium in 1999, becoming Malaysia's first female athlete to win a World title.



Datuk Nicol and the Malaysian Women's team at the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur.



Competing at the British Junior Open at age 12 playing the Under-14 category and eventually winning the title.



Datuk Nicol claimed her eighth and final World Championship title in Cairo, Egypt in 2014, defeating Raneem El Weleily 3-2 in the finals, in one of the biggest comebacks of her career.

# Turning Sporting Lessons into Opportunity

When Datuk Nicol retired from professional squash in 2019, she faced a different challenge, what should come after being World No. 1?

Part of the answer came through former Colombian squash player Mariana de Reyes. Together, they began translating the lessons of elite sport into community development, building the Nicol David Organisation (NDO) based on the belief that sport can develop not only athletes, but healthier, more confident young people and stronger families.

Its Little Legends programme combines squash with English, life skills and other learning opportunities for children from underserved communities.



The Little Legends programme currently has a total of 180 children aged 8 to twelve.



Datuk Nicol and CEO & co-founder, Mariana de Reyes launched the foundation in 2022 to empower children and communities through sport, education and mental health.

That work has expanded beyond children. Ibu Legends supports mothers through mental well-being, health, financial literacy and personal development. In 2025, it reached around 300 women. Bapa Legends, launched in 2026, creates a similar space for fathers to strengthen their physical, emotional and financial well-being while becoming positive role models within their families.

The organisation has also deliberately created pathways for women in coaching. Through internships and mentoring, young women have been trained into professional roles, with women now comprising about 80 per cent of NDO’s coaching team.

# Taking Well-Being into Schools

Datuk Nicol’s vision has increasingly moved beyond the squash court.

Through +Play, NDO combines movement with positive psychology to help schoolchildren build healthier habits, confidence and resilience. In 2025, its programmes reached 2,181 children across 42 public schools and engaged 118 teachers.

+Play Cikgu helps educators become ambassadors for physical and mental well-being, while +Play Finance introduces financial literacy alongside movement and positive psychology. NDO has also partnered on programmes such as Hoops + Health, using basketball to support physical, social and emotional development.

Datuk Nicol has further brought attention to the relationship between sport and mental health, including through initiatives that encourage a more open conversation around athletes’ and

young people’s well-being. Her relationship with national sport has evolved too. At the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, Datuk Nicol served as Malaysia’s Deputy Chef de Mission, this time supporting another generation of athletes carrying the country’s hopes onto the world stage.

For Datuk Nicol, there is another milestone on the horizon. Squash will finally make its Olympic debut at Los Angeles 2028. She may never have had the opportunity to compete for an Olympic medal herself, but the players who follow will step onto a stage her generation spent years helping the sport reach. Her influence has also extended well beyond the court. Since 2002, Datuk Nicol has served as a UNDP National Goodwill Ambassador, using her platform to support education, youth development, women’s advancement and access to opportunity.



Datuk Nicol’s final year on the professional squash tour in 2019.



Today, Datuk Nicol creates impact through her foundation, motivational talks and ambassadorial roles.

# Success That Creates Possibility

Datuk Nicol’s sporting career has received international recognition, including being voted the World Games Greatest Athlete of All Time in 2020 and an induction into the PSA Hall of Fame in 2024. Today, as Pro-Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University Malaysia, she continues to champion the development of our national athletes, while representing Malaysia at the Olympics and other major multi-sports games.

Yet amid these achievements, one of the lessons Datuk Nicol holds closest has little to do with winning. It came from her mother, who believed that winning mattered less than the person she became along the way.

Today, Datuk Nicol hopes young Malaysians will dream boldly, accept discomfort as part of growth and understand that excellence is built through consistency rather than perfection. More importantly, she believes achievement gains greater meaning when it helps someone else move forward.

Her journey reflects the Merdeka Award Trust’s commitment to recognising excellence that creates lasting benefit. From becoming World No. 1 to helping children, parents, teachers and young athletes discover their own potential, Datuk Nicol’s story shows how personal achievement can become a platform for collective possibility.

*“The more successful you are, the more humble you should be”*



## OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose meaningful and impactful contributions in the field of science, technology and innovation have advanced knowledge, driven discovery and fostered the innovative application of technology for the public good. This category honours achievements across research, scientific discovery and technological innovation that have created lasting value for Malaysia.

2026  
RECIPIENT



Academician  
Emeritus Professor  
Datin Paduka Setia  
Dato' Dr  
Aini Ideris

JOINT RECIPIENT



As the Vice Chancellor of UPM.



Professor Aini's vaccine innovation.



Together with her mentor, Professor Emeritus Dato' Dr Abdul Latif Ibrahim, whose guidance helped shape her journey.



Professor Aini with her family.

## Turning Science into Solutions

For more than four decades, Academician Emeritus Professor Datin Paduka Setia Dato' Dr Aini Ideris has pursued science with a practical question in mind, asking how knowledge can solve problems that affect people's everyday lives.

Her answer has taken shape through vaccines that protect poultry, diagnostic technologies that strengthen disease surveillance, institutions that bring university research to market and generations of scientists she has helped nurture. At the heart of this work is a conviction that scientific excellence becomes most

meaningful when it reaches beyond the laboratory.

Receiving the 2026 Merdeka Award for Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation is, for Professor Aini, deeply humbling. She shares the recognition with her family, mentors, students, researchers, technicians, farmers, industry partners and colleagues who accompanied her journey – and sees it as an affirmation of Malaysia's ability to develop scientific solutions with relevance far beyond its borders.

## Science Rooted in Everyday Needs

Professor Aini's early interest in veterinary science grew from recognising how closely animal health is intertwined with human well-being, livelihoods and food security. After graduating in Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Universiti Pertanian Malaysia in 1979, she pursued a Master of Veterinary Science in Avian Medicine at the University of Liverpool. She later completed her PhD at UPM and undertook advanced training at the University of California, Davis and Cornell University, USA.

These experiences exposed her to developments in molecular

biology and vaccinology, while reinforcing something equally important solutions developed for temperate countries could not always be transplanted directly into tropical environments. In places where reliable refrigeration was not always available, a vaccine that worked perfectly in the laboratory could become far less practical in the field.

For Professor Aini, this presented both a scientific problem and an opportunity for her to explore the possibility of creating vaccines designed for the realities of its own farms, climate and communities.



Professor Aini's passion grew from the vital link between animal health and human well-being.

## A Vaccine Designed for the Real World

That thinking led to one of Professor Aini's defining scientific contributions – the heat-stable Newcastle disease vaccine, NDV4-UPM.

Newcastle disease can cause severe poultry losses, particularly where effective vaccination is difficult. Conventional vaccines often depend on uninterrupted refrigeration. NDV4-UPM reduced that reliance and could be administered more practically through feed or water, making the vaccination more practical and accessible, particularly in tropical and resource-constrained settings.

As Principal Researcher, Professor Aini led the development of NDV4-UPM and a tissue-culture adapted fowl pox vaccine. She later contributed as Co-Researcher to live and inactivated infectious bursal disease vaccines and a reverse genetics Newcastle disease vaccine.

Critically, these innovations did not remain within the laboratory. NDV4-UPM and the fowl pox vaccines became the first Malaysia's university-developed animal vaccine to be successfully commercialised internationally. Together with the other vaccines, they have reached more than 20 countries. By 2022, programmes involving these technologies were estimated to have enabled the vaccination of more than 550 million poultry, including through initiatives supported by international development organisations.

The significance of Professor Aini's work is measured in more than doses delivered. For farmers, healthier flocks meant fewer losses and greater continuity in a protein source that remains important to millions of families.



Together with other vaccines, Professor Aini's innovation reached more than 20 countries, helping safeguard a vital source of protein for millions.



Professor Aini as Avian Medicine Clinician.

## From Discovery to Disease Control

Professor Aini's work extended beyond prevention into diagnosis.

Her research generated more than 30 patented innovations and prototypes in avian science, including molecular technologies for detecting several important poultry diseases. Rapid diagnostic platforms developed under the RealCheck™, helped laboratories distinguish diseases more quickly and support earlier containment.

The importance of that capability became particularly evident during Malaysia's avian influenza outbreaks in 2004 and 2005. Professor Aini and her team contributed her diagnostic expertise and worked alongside the Department of Veterinary Services and Veterinary Research Institute on surveillance and epidemiological monitoring, bringing scientific knowledge directly into the country's response to a real and immediate threat.

For Professor Aini, vaccines and diagnostics form part of the same objective of providing veterinarians and farmers with practical tools to protect animal health before a disease spreads further.

# Crossing the Gap from Research to Market

Scientific discovery was only part of the challenge. During the 1980s and 1990s, Malaysia had limited infrastructure for moving university research through regulatory approval, manufacturing and commercialisation.

Professor Aini worked closely with Remee Holdings, now known as Malaysian Vaccines and Pharmaceuticals Sdn Bhd, helping to train personnel, provide technical expertise and strengthen vaccine manufacturing capability. The partnership was instrumental in establishing the first and the only domestic animal vaccine company and reducing long-term reliance on imported vaccines.

# Leadership That Remained Close to Science

Professor Aini’s journey eventually took her from the laboratory to the helm of UPM, where she became the university’s eighth Vice-Chancellor and the first woman to hold the position, serving from 2016 to 2020. Currently she is the Pro-Chancellor of IMU University, since 2021.

Despite major leadership responsibilities, she remained committed to scholarship and mentorship. Over the course of her career, Professor Aini has supervised more than 100 postgraduate students, many of whom now serve in senior positions across academia, research and industry, nationally and internationally.

Her leadership extended beyond Malaysia. From 2015 to 2019, Professor Aini became the first Asian woman to serve as Vice-President of the World Veterinary Poultry Association and was inducted into its Hall of Honour. She has also contributed through scientific organisations and expert networks linked to international animal health and food security.

But titles and accolades tell only part of Professor Aini’s approach to leadership. At UPM, she championed the concept of Ihsan, the pursuit of excellence grounded in humility, responsibility and ethical conduct. Ihsan reflects the principle that has guided her career achievements and should ultimately create opportunities for others.

She also chaired work on Malaysia’s National Biotechnology Policy from 2001 to 2003 and contributed to national biotechnology institutions and research priorities.

At UPM, she continued this emphasis on translating knowledge into value. As Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 2008 to 2013, she helped strengthen the university’s research-to-market ecosystem. That foundation, Putra Science Park, has since supported thousands of intellectual properties, hundreds of commercialised technologies and close to 100 of start-ups.



Professor Aini with Co-Researchers and Postgraduate Students.

# A Legacy Through Science and People

Professor Aini’s work continues across scientific governance, higher education, industry and mentorship. She remains a strong advocate for stronger research commercialisation, food security, science diplomacy and the One Health approach linking animal, human and environmental health.

The vaccines may be among her most visible achievements, but her broader legacy lies in demonstrating a complete pathway – from understanding a real problem, to scientific discovery, commercialisation, national capability and the development of people who can carry the work forward.

“Science without application is an unfinished journey; true innovation lies in turning knowledge into solutions that serve humanity”



As a firm advocate for food security through science.



Professor Aini receiving the FAVA Asian Animal Health Award 2026.



## OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Presented to the most deserving candidate whose meaningful and impactful contributions in the field of science, technology and innovation have advanced knowledge, driven discovery and fostered the innovative application of technology for the public good. This category honours achievements across research, scientific discovery and technological innovation that have created lasting value for Malaysia.

2026  
RECIPIENT



Academician  
Professor Emerita  
Datuk Dr Asma  
Ismail

JOINT RECIPIENT

# Building Bridges from Knowledge to Impact

For Academician Professor Emerita Datuk Dr Asma Ismail, science has never ended with discovery. Throughout four decades of service, she has worked on a larger question, how can knowledge move from the laboratory into people's lives, institutions and national development?

That question has taken her from molecular biology and infectious disease diagnostics to university leadership and eventually, national science and education policy. Along the way, she became the first woman to hold several of Malaysia's most senior positions in higher education and scientific leadership.

As the recipient of the 2026 Merdeka Award for Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation, Professor Asma attributes the recognition to the researchers, students, colleagues, policymakers, institutions and family members who have been part of a shared journey to make science useful to society.



## When Science Meets Human Need

Professor Asma's fascination with biology began with curiosity about the complexity of life. She studied Biology at the University of Nevada before pursuing postgraduate training in microbiology and completing her PhD in cellular and molecular biology in 1986.

Returning to Malaysia, she encountered a practical public health problem. Typhoid fever continued to affect communities, yet conventional diagnosis could be slow and difficult to access, especially in resource-constrained settings.

Professor Asma and her team began looking for a better way. Their research identified a typhoid-specific antigen and translated the discovery into TYPHIDOT™, followed by Typhidot-M and TyphiRapid.

TYPHIDOT™ reduced the time needed for diagnosis from several days to approximately three hours. The technology was commercialised internationally and reached more than 18 countries across Asia and Africa, with more than two million cases reportedly diagnosed using the test. TyphiRapid later simplified the process further through a lateral-flow format capable of producing results within minutes.

The innovations became important early examples of Malaysian biomedical research moving successfully from laboratory discovery to international application. For Professor Asma, however, their real significance was simpler, people could receive answers sooner, allowing treatment decisions to be made more quickly.



TYPHIDOT-M.



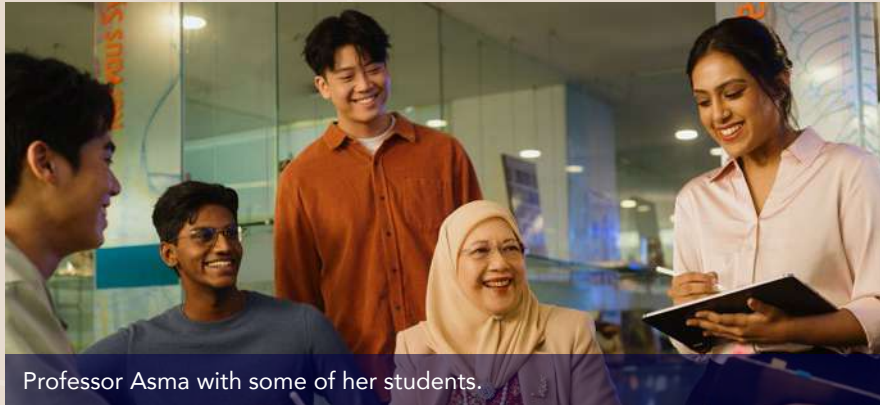
TyphiRapid.



The Typhoid research team.



TYPHIDOT.



Professor Asma with some of her students.



My postgraduates working on enteric diseases. They are now academic leaders at USM.

# Building Systems for Science to Flourish

TYPHIDOT™ taught Professor Asma what could happen when scientific discovery found its way into the real world. It also taught that individual breakthroughs alone could not transform a nation. Researchers required institutions, funding, recognition and pathways that enabled good ideas to grow.

From 2006, she contributed to the development of Malaysia’s Research University framework, strengthening the role of universities in advanced research, postgraduate training and innovation. She also supported the development of the Malaysian Research Assessment system and later spearheaded initiatives such as *Anugerah Akademik Negara* and *Top Research Scientists Malaysia*.

As her responsibilities grew, Professor Asma crossed a series of thresholds that no Malaysian woman before her had crossed. She became the first woman Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia and subsequently Universiti Sains Malaysia, as well as Malaysia’s first female Director-General of Higher Education. From 2016 to 2022, she served as President of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia and later became the country’s first female Science Advisor.

Yet she has never regarded being “the first” as the achievement itself. What mattered, she says, was doing the work with integrity and making the pathway less difficult for those who came afterwards.



# Bringing Evidence into National Decisions

At the Academy of Sciences Malaysia, Professor Asma sought to strengthen the bridge between scientists and policymakers.

Under her leadership, expert groups brought evidence into discussions on national challenges, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also worked to give younger scientists a stronger voice, including through the Young Scientists Network and its engagement with national science leadership.

Her contribution to policymaking has spanned the National Policy on Science, Technology and Innovation 2021-2030, the 10-10 MySTIE Framework, National Biotechnology Policy, National Robotics

Roadmap and other strategic initiatives.

Education remained equally important. Having contributed to the Malaysian Education Blueprint for Higher Education 2013-2025, she later chaired the expert panel developing the Higher Education Blueprint 2026-2035 and became closely involved in wider national education reform.

Another important focus is planetary health. Professor Asma chairs the National Planetary Health Action Plan, which seeks to bring human health, environmental sustainability and development into the same national conversation.

Across these efforts runs a consistent belief that writing policies is only the beginning. Their value depends on implementation.

She has learnt that transformation cannot simply be instructed from the top. It requires evidence, listening, trust and shared ownership. Mindsets must change before behaviour can change.



# Leadership Through People



Perhaps the legacy Professor Asma values most is found in the people she has helped develop.

Many of her students, mentees and colleagues have gone on to become professors, deans, vice-chancellors, Academy Fellows and national leaders. To her, this represents a deeper form of achievement than any individual position.

Today, as Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer of IMU University, she continues working to connect healthcare education, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, digital transformation and sustainability. She also remains involved internationally through scientific academies and advisory networks.



Her guiding values remain integrity, service, excellence, courage, humility and purpose. She believes science and technology must ultimately remain centred on humanity, equity and the well-being of the planet.

Professor Asma’s journey reflects the Merdeka Award Trust’s commitment to recognising contributions whose impact extends beyond individual achievement. Her story is one of bridges – between research and patients, universities and industry, scientists and policymakers and one generation of leaders and the next.

For her, knowledge reaches its highest purpose when it creates opportunities for others and leaves society stronger than before.



“Be curious enough to discover, courageous enough to innovate, humble enough to collaborate and committed enough to ensure that your knowledge creates lasting impact”



## OUTSTANDING SCHOLASTIC & ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Presented to the most deserving Malaysian whose outstanding scholarship and academic excellence have advanced the pursuit of knowledge and contributed to significant discoveries, whether pure, applied or emerging. This category honours scholars, researchers and academicians whose work, which may also cover the social sciences such as sociology, economics, history and geography, has shaped intellectual thought and advanced their respective disciplines.

2026  
RECIPIENT



Emeritus Professor  
Dato' Dr Hajah  
Asmah Haji Omar



Professor Asmah with her family, whose love and support have been a constant throughout her journey in linguistics.

Professor Asmah siblings.

## Language as the Life of a Nation

For Emeritus Professor Dato’ Dr Hajah Asmah Haji Omar, language has never been merely a collection of words. It is a reflection of behaviour, culture and knowledge – a living record of how people understand themselves and relate to one another.

Across more than six decades of scholarship, Professor Asmah has devoted herself to studying, documenting and strengthening Malaysia’s languages, from Malay and its dialects to the indigenous languages of Sabah, Sarawak and Orang Asli communities. Her work has helped shape language policy, education and linguistic scholarship while preserving knowledge that might otherwise have been diminished with time. More fundamentally, it has contributed to a deeper understanding of the extraordinary linguistic heritage of a nation in which the way people speak can reveal stories of place, identity, community and belonging.

For Professor Asmah, receiving the 2026 Merdeka Award for Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement is a moment of gratitude to Allah SWT. She regards the honour not as hers alone, but as one shared with her parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, family and the many people who encouraged her intellectual curiosity. Throughout her life, she has been guided by the importance of thinking deeply, asking questions and sharing what one learns.

## A Childhood Shaped by Many Languages

Long before Professor Asmah became a linguist, she was already growing up among languages.

In Jitra, Kedah, Malay and Siamese were part of her daily life, while Arabic could be heard from students at her father’s Madrasah An-Najah, many of whom came from Malaya, North Sumatra and Southern Thailand. Then, at the age of eight, English entered her world.

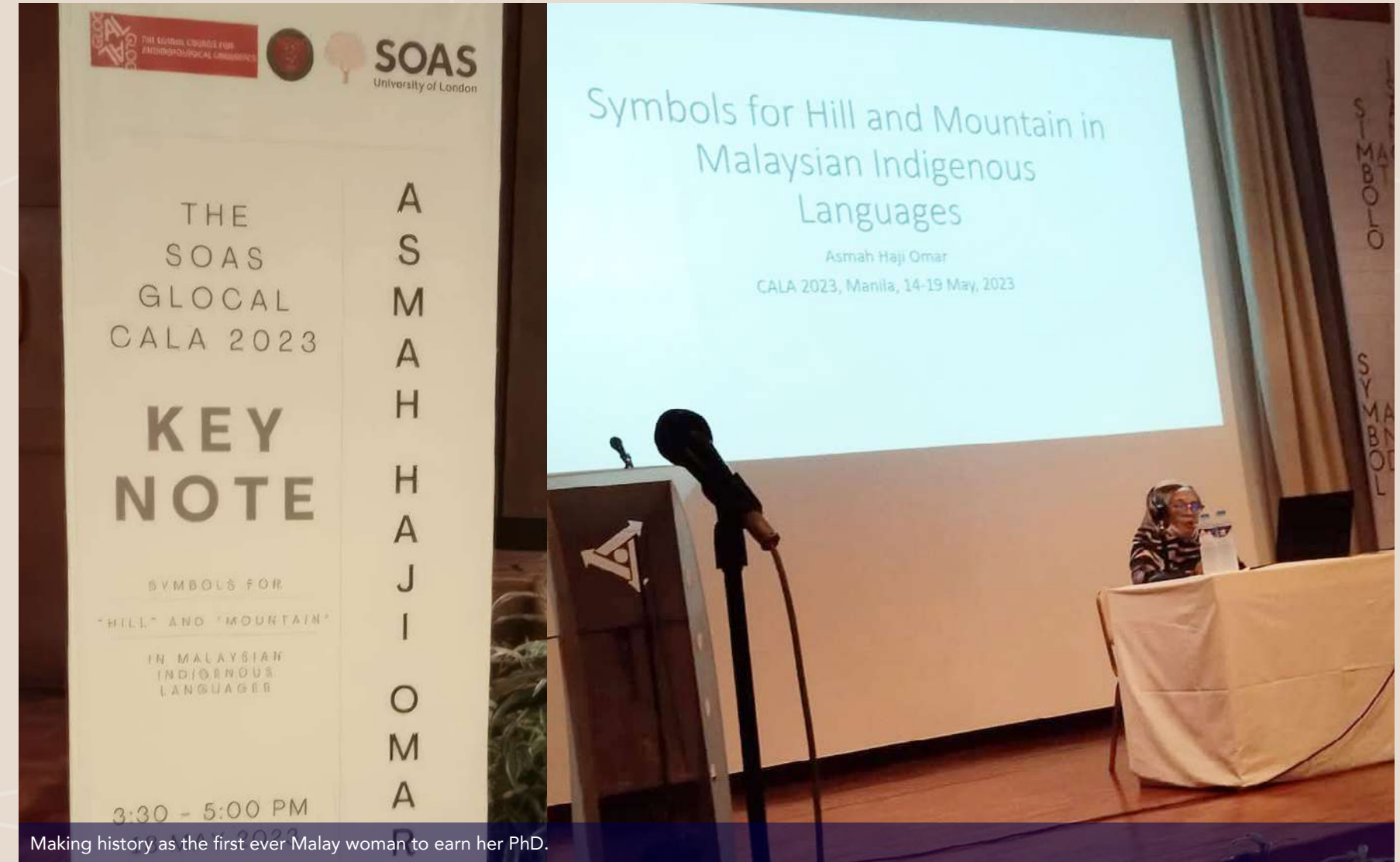
Her education eventually took her to the Malay Girls’ College in Kuala Lumpur before she returned to Kedah to pursue her Higher School Certificate at Sultan Abdul Hamid College.

By the time university beckoned, her teachers were encouraging her to continue her studies in Britain. Instead, Professor Asmah chose Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta. Although she had read

extensively about Britain, she realised she knew comparatively little about neighbouring societies closely connected to the Malay world. So, in 1958, at just 18, she left for Indonesia.

Jakarta opened up an entirely new linguistic world for Professor Asmah. Her studies in the Indonesian Language and Literature required proficiency in Arabic, Sanskrit, Old Javanese and Modern Javanese. She also learnt Dutch and French so she could access academic works unavailable in English.

That breadth of learning would later shape Professor Asmah’s distinctive approach to linguistics. Language, she came to understand, could not be studied in isolation. To understand how people speak, one must also understand where they came from, the cultures that shaped them and the histories carried within their words.



## Persevering Through Resistance

After completing her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, Professor Asmah joined Universiti Malaya (UM) in 1963 as a lecturer in Linguistics. Before long, she set her sights on a doctorate at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Getting there, however, proved far from straightforward. SOAS was initially unfamiliar with Indonesian qualifications, while resistance within her department threatened her ability to obtain study leave.

Rather than abandon her goal, she approached renowned linguist Professor R. H. Robins. Her published research impressed him sufficiently for her to be invited to present her work before academics in London. She was subsequently admitted as a doctoral candidate under his supervision.

Professor Asmah eventually gave up her Commonwealth Scholarship and financed her own studies rather than resign from UM. She completed her PhD in General Linguistics at the University of London in just over two years, graduating in 1969 with pioneering research centred on the Iban language of Sarawak. In doing so, she made history as the first Malay woman ever to earn a PhD, across any field of study and anywhere in the world.

The experience reinforced a lesson that would stay with her scholarship requires independence of thought, resilience and the courage to defend one’s intellectual position.

# Giving Malaysia’s Languages Their Place

Back at UM, Professor Asmah played an important role in implementing Malaysia’s National Language Policy, helping Malay take its place as the national and official language while ensuring English remained an important language of academic and professional access.

As Academic Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor, she helped develop language programmes for lecturers, administrators and students. In 1972, she co-founded UM’s Language Centre, which later evolved into the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, where Professor Asmah would go on to serve as Dean.



Professor Asmah leading a fieldwork training session for staff from UM’s Faculty of Languages and Linguistics.



Attending the 30<sup>th</sup> Majlis Bahasa Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia (MABBIM) in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam, 4-6 Mac 1991.

Her influence extended to the standardisation of Malay spelling and technical terminology and to regional linguistic cooperation with Indonesia and Brunei. Yet she consistently argued that cooperation did not require uniformity. Language planning, in her view, had to serve actual users.

That practical philosophy shaped her position on issues ranging from *Bahasa Baku* and Jawi spelling to the borrowing of Indonesian terminology into Malaysian Malay.



Receiving the Professor Emeritus Award Certificate from the Chancellor of UM, Almarhum Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah Al-Maghfur-Lah, Sultan Perak Darul Ridzuan.



At the launch of the Asmah Haji Omar Learning Space at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, UM.

# Bringing Indigenous Languages into the Record

Professor Asmah’s fieldwork began in 1963 with the *Kentak Bong* language in Baling. Over the decades that follow, she documented *Orang Asli* languages and indigenous languages across Sabah and Sarawak – work she called “upstream research” because it required meeting communities in their own environments.

The work went beyond recording words for posterity. Her scholarship contributed to the development of grammar, spelling and teaching resources for indigenous languages. She played a role in the standardisation and teaching of Iban and contributed to discussions surrounding the teaching of Kadazandusun as a Pupil’s Own Language.

## Knowledge That Continues to Travel

The scale of Professor Asmah’s scholarship is beyond extraordinary. Across more than six decades, she has written 84 academic books, 10 school texts and 155 journal articles, in addition to contributing to numerous dictionaries, encyclopaedias and edited works.

Among her influential publications are *Nahu Melayu Mutakhir*, *Susur Galur Bahasa Melayu*, *Ensiklopedia Bahasa Melayu* and studies of classical works such as *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Even now in her eighties, Professor Asmah continues to work with Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka on studies of Malay, Bahasa Indonesia, semiotics, conversation and Arabic-derived vocabulary.

When the future of Kadazandusun teaching was questioned, Professor Asmah helped design research that went beyond theoretical arguments. The study examined classroom experiences and parental attitudes. The results provided evidence supporting the continued teaching of the language in schools.

For Professor Asmah, this mattered because linguistic diversity was never something Malaysia needed to overcome. In fact, it was part of what the country had inherited, where every language can find “a place under the Malaysian sun.”

Her leadership has also extended beyond writing. She founded the Malaysian Association of Modern Languages, established the Institute of Malay Civilization at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and supervised more than 70 postgraduate students, many of whom went on to leadership positions in academia.

Her parents often reminded her not to be *kedekut*, or stingy, with knowledge. That simple advice has become a lifelong principle for her.

Professor Asmah’s journey reflects the Merdeka Award Trust’s commitment to recognising scholarship that strengthens Malaysia’s intellectual and cultural foundations. Her legacy lies



With indigenous students, reflecting Professor Asmah’s lifelong commitment to Malaysia’s linguistic heritage.



Indigenous conference at Damai, Kuching.



Majlis Wacana Merong Mahawangsa, featuring one of the classical Malay works Professor Asmah studied extensively.

not only in recording how Malaysians speak, but in helping the nation understand why language matters, carrying memory, identity and knowledge from one generation to the next.

“Language is behaviour, culture and knowledge”



## ANUGERAH KHAS MERDEKA

Presented as a special honour to the most deserving candidate, Malaysian or international, whose extraordinary contributions have profoundly advanced Malaysia and enriched the lives of its people. This category recognises achievements of exceptional significance that have delivered lasting improvements to the nation's well-being and quality of life, leaving an enduring legacy for generations to come.

2026  
RECIPIENT



Academician  
Professor Emeritus  
Tan Sri Datuk Dr  
Omar Abdul  
Rahman



Tan Sri Omar and family, 1998.



Tan Sri Omar, circa 2022.

## Science in Service of Nation-Building

Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Datuk Dr Omar Abdul Rahman began his career looking through a microscope. Over the six decades that followed, his field of vision would grow steadily wider.

Tan Sri Omar has worked where science meets national purpose. From veterinary pathology, he expanded into higher education, institution-building and eventually the shaping of Malaysia's science, technology and innovation landscape. In his later years, that same sense of public responsibility has drawn him towards a fundamental question, how can Malaysians build a more harmonious society together?

The 2026 Anugerah Khas Merdeka recognises this extraordinary breadth of contribution. From laboratories and universities to the Prime Minister's Department, scientific institutions and community dialogues, Tan Sri Omar's work has consistently been guided by the belief that knowledge becomes most valuable when it strengthens society.



Tan Sri Omar with the late Duke of Edinburgh during a visit to his laboratory at Cambridge, 1965.



Tan Sri Omar as UPM Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, 1982-1984.

## From Veterinary Science to Building a University

After graduating in Veterinary Science from the University of Sydney in 1958, Tan Sri Omar continued his training at the University of Queensland before joining Malaysia's Veterinary Research Institute in Ipoh. As a pathologist, he published extensively on animal diseases, laying the scientific foundations for what would become a career increasingly concerned with the wider systems surrounding research.

From 1963 to 1966, he pursued his doctorate at the University of Cambridge, completing his research on pulmonary reactions to injury within three years. He was among the earliest Malaysians and the first Malay, to earn a doctorate from Cambridge.

A defining chapter followed with the establishment of Universiti Pertanian

Malaysia. Tan Sri Omar became its first Professor and Founding Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences. With colleagues and international partners, he helped establish academic programmes, introduce university systems and prepare the young institution for its first generation of graduates.

By the time Tan Sri Omar became Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs from 1982 to 1984, UPM itself had expanded considerably. It was during this period that his attention increasingly shifted from conducting science to asking how science itself could be organised, funded and applied for national development.

## Building Malaysia's STI Foundations

That question took on national significance in 1984, when Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad appointed Tan Sri Omar as Malaysia's first Science Adviser.

His mandate was not simply to advise on scientific matters, but to help create the conditions in which science and technology could support Malaysia's development.

Tan Sri Omar helped strengthen the country's STI policy and governance framework, including the incorporation of science and technology priorities into the Fifth Malaysia Plan. He was also closely associated with the Intensification of Research in Priority Areas programme, which provided strategic funding for research in areas of national importance.

Over the years, Tan Sri Omar also played an important role in the development of institutions that would become part of

Malaysia's scientific infrastructure, including the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT), Malaysian Technology Development Corporation, MIMOS, Technology Park Malaysia, Composites Technology Research Malaysia and the National Science Centre.

Among the institutions closest to his vision was the Academy of Sciences Malaysia. Established after years of advocacy by the scientific community, the Academy provided a national platform through which leading scientists, engineers and medical professionals could contribute evidence-based advice to government. Tan Sri Omar became its Founding President in 1995.

His belief was straightforward, good science required not only researchers, but institutions capable of translating evidence into decisions.



Accompanying Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister during his first official visit to China, 1985.



Tan Sri Omar with the first management group of MIGHT.

# Taking Malaysian Experience Beyond Its Borders

Tan Sri Omar’s work increasingly connected Malaysia with international scientific and development networks.

Through the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management, he promoted approaches to technology management and development across Commonwealth countries. He also co-convoked the Langkawi International Dialogue, bringing together heads of government, policymakers and specialists in an informal environment where experiences on governance, technology and development could be exchanged directly.

His involvement extended to international scientific organisations and UNESCO-related bodies, as well as networks across Asia, the Islamic world and developing countries.

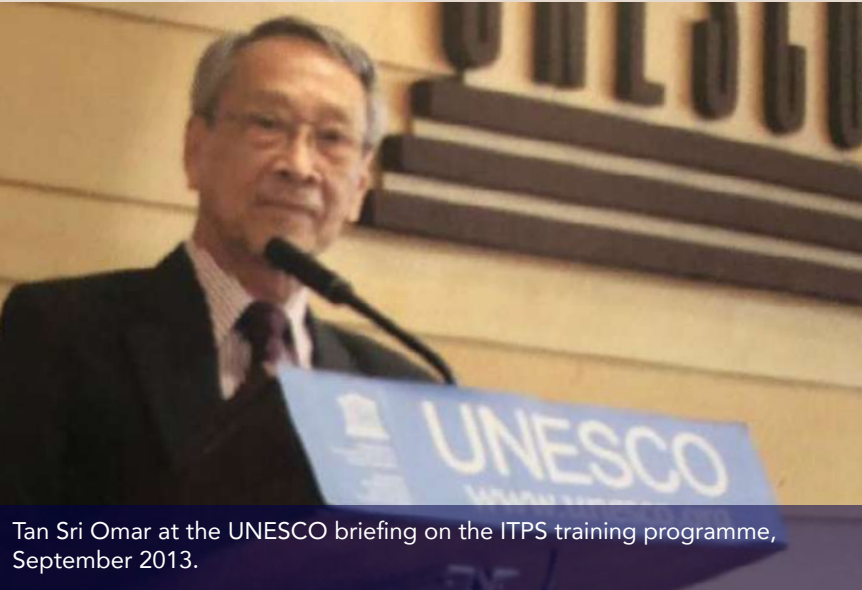
After retiring as Science Adviser in 2001 following more than four decades of government service, Tan Sri Omar remained active in technology companies, venture capital, higher education and scientific organisations.

His accumulated experience was distilled into The Essentials of Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, published in 2013. The book subsequently became the basis of an international STI policy training programme that reached officials from more than 50 developing countries.

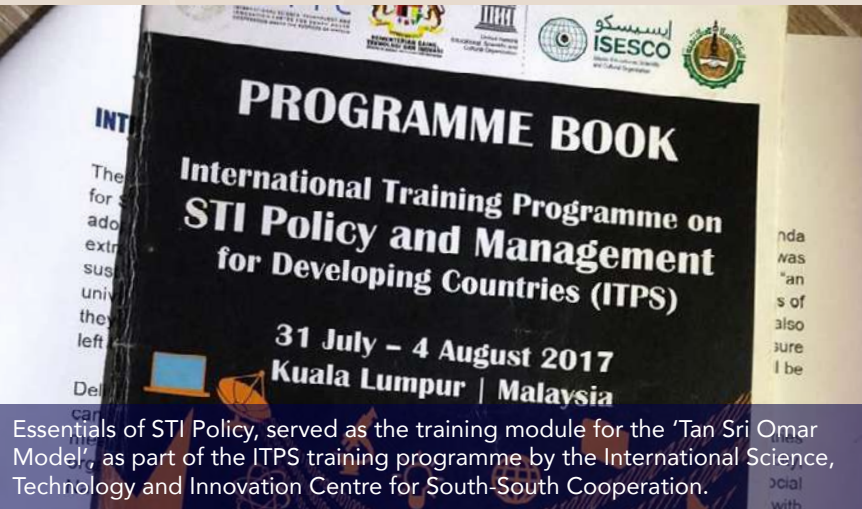
In 2021, UCSI University established the Tan Sri Omar Abdul Rahman Centre for STI Policy Studies, carrying forward his emphasis on evidence-based policy and the development of future science policymakers.



Tan Sri Omar contributing to the discussion at the second Langkawi International Dialogue in July 1996.



Tan Sri Omar at the UNESCO briefing on the ITPS training programme, September 2013.



Essentials of STI Policy, served as the training module for the 'Tan Sri Omar Model', as part of the ITPS training programme by the International Science, Technology and Innovation Centre for South-South Cooperation.



A presentation on Harmoni-Mesra, developed by Dialog Rakyat.



Tan Sri Omar and wife, Puan Sri Asma Zainal Ariffin, admiring the Trophy.



Tan Sri Omar played a key role in Dialog Rakyat, helping to shape the Harmoni-Mesra concept, principles and practices.



Coffee table book about Harmoni-Mesra Campus Programme at UCSI University.



Tan Sri Omar's contributions to higher education were recognised with the Tokoh Akademik Negara Award in 2011.



Tan Sri Omar receiving the Tun Abdul Razak International Award in 2000.

# From Scientific Progress to Social Harmony

For Tan Sri Omar, however, national development has never been measured through technology alone.

In recent years, his attention has increasingly turned towards social cohesion. Concerned by racial division, religious intolerance and polarising rhetoric, he began working through Dialog Rakyat for National Cohesion and Unity to revisit the spirit of the Rukun Negara.

From dialogues held between 2016 and 2019 emerged the Harmoni-Mesra framework – a practical approach centred on respect, trust, understanding, ethical conduct and opportunities for Malaysians of different backgrounds to interact meaningfully.

The Harmoni-Mesra Campus Programme, launched with UCSI University in 2022, seeks to bring these principles into university communities and nurture a new generation that values dialogue over division.

It is a fitting continuation of his earlier work. Whether building scientific institutions or strengthening community relationships, Tan Sri Omar has consistently focused on systems that outlast individuals.

His contributions have earned honorary doctorates from universities in Malaysia and abroad, alongside recognitions including the ASEAN Achievement Award in Science, the Tun Abdul Razak Award, Tokoh Akademik Negara and the KSI National Unity Leadership Award.

But at 94, he appears less interested in looking back at what he has accomplished than in asking what he can still contribute.

Tan Sri Omar’s journey reflects the spirit of the Merdeka Award Trust through sustained service, knowledge applied with purpose and leadership directed towards strengthening the nation for generations to come.

*“You cannot help getting older, but you do not have to get old; stay active physically, mentally and socially”*

a ‘petua’ that continues to guide Tan Sri Omar.



## ANUGERAH HARAPAN MERDEKA

Recognises aspiring and promising young individuals and organisations whose excellence, innovation and impactful contributions have demonstrated exceptional potential to shape Malaysia's future. This category honours emerging changemakers across Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community, Outstanding Contribution to Environment and Planetary Health, Outstanding Contribution to Humanities, Arts & Sports and Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology and Innovation, whose achievements inspire progress and contribute meaningfully to the nation.

2026  
RECIPIENT



Cheah  
Liek Hou



Cheah Liek Hou as a newborn.



A proud moment as he receives his degree in Corporate Communications from Universiti Putra Malaysia.

## Waiting for His Moment

Cheah was already competing internationally when para-badminton was still developing as a global sport. His first men's singles world title came in 2005. Yet, however much he achieved, one ambition remained out of reach, the Paralympic Games. Para-badminton was only introduced at the Paralympics in 2020. By then, Cheah had spent more than 15 years competing, waiting and wondering whether the opportunity would ever come.

Along the way came difficult stretches when results faltered and doubts crept in. He began to question whether it was time to put down the racquet and pursue a more conventional career. Remaining a full-time athlete meant accepting financial uncertainty, especially when income depended heavily on performance.



The wait for finally over! Cheah's winning moments at the Tokyo Paralympic Games 2020.

## Turning Imperfection into Strength

When Cheah Liek Hou first picked up a badminton racquet at the age of nine, para-badminton was still years away from making its debut at the Paralympic Games. There was no obvious path to the world's biggest sporting stage, nor any certainty that his childhood passion could become a career.

He played anyway.

Born with Erb's palsy, which affects the strength and movement of his right arm, Cheah grew up learning to adapt. His mother recognised his interest in badminton early, ferrying him from school to training, finding him good

coaches and ensuring he had the equipment and support he needed. As his talent developed, Cheah progressed into more structured training, including at the Bukit Jalil Sports School, where the childhood pastime began to take on a more serious purpose.

Looking back, Cheah credits much of his journey to his parents, whose sacrifices gave him the freedom to pursue a path with no guaranteed outcome. Long before there were medals, podiums or international recognition, they invested their time, energy and belief in a boy who simply loved badminton.

When para-badminton finally made its Paralympic debut, Cheah was ready. After more than a decade of waiting for a stage that might never come, Cheah won gold in the men's singles SU5 event, becoming a Paralympic champion for Malaysia. Four years later, at Paris 2024, he successfully defended the title, becoming a two-time Paralympic champion.

To this day, those victories remain his proudest achievements because they represent far more than two tournaments. They are the outcome of years spent enduring, adapting and remaining at the top of his sport.



Gold Medal at the Tokyo Paralympic Games.

## Sustaining Excellence Across Generations

Cheah's record extends well beyond the Paralympics. Across singles and doubles, he has accumulated 16 world championship titles, including nine men's singles crowns between 2005 and 2026.

His ninth singles title, secured at the 2026 BWF Para Badminton World Championships in Bahrain, marked another milestone in an international career characterised by unusual longevity. He has also accumulated more than 70 international titles and spent much of his professional career among the world's highest-ranked SU5 players, entering Paris 2024 as World No. 1.

In 2025, the Badminton World Federation recognised him as Men's Para Badminton Player of the Year, while he and Mohd Fareez Anuar were also recognised as Para Badminton Pair of the Year.

Yet sustaining success has demanded constant adjustment. At 38, Cheah is increasingly conscious that recovery matters as much as training. His routine revolves around practice, physical conditioning, rest and preparation for the next competition.

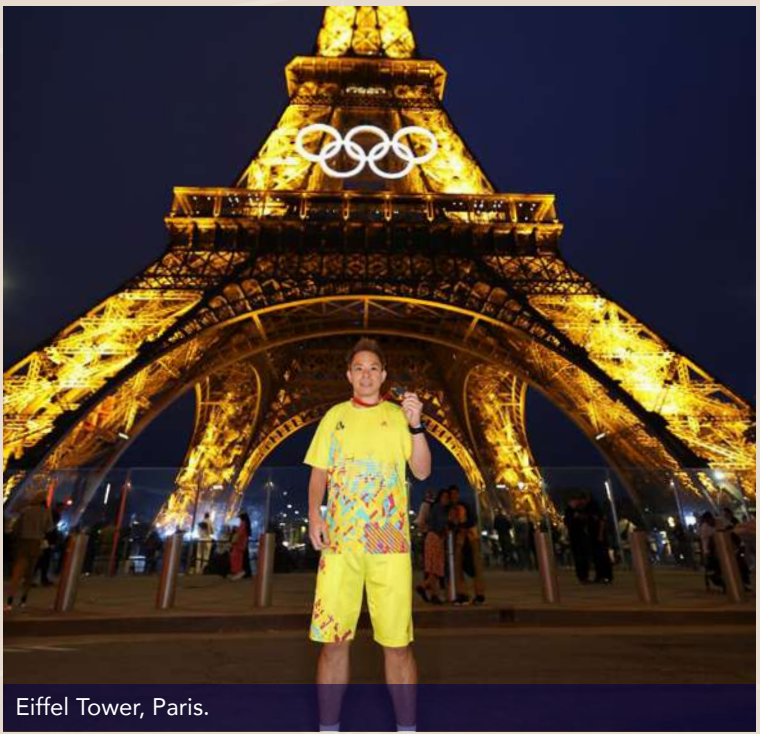
When results decline, he does not simply accept them. He asks what went wrong, looks for the reason and works on returning stronger. This habit of self-examination has become central to the resilience that has kept him competitive across different generations of opponents.



Badminton World Federation Gala Dinner 2025 presenting Cheah as Best Men's Para Badminton Player of the year.



Cheah's second Gold Medal came from the Paris Paralympic Games in 2024.



Eiffel Tower, Paris.



Preparing goods for a CSR programme.



Sending goods for Hulu Langat flood victims.



CSR programme at Rumah Victory Children Home.



## Beyond Medals

Success has given Cheah more than medals and titles, it has also given him a platform which he chooses to use for others. Following his Paralympic successes, Cheah channelled portions of his incentives towards charitable causes, including MAKNA, orphanages, communities affected by the Selangor floods, retired para-athletes and people with disabilities experiencing financial hardship. He has also

participated in health and community initiatives through corporate partnerships.

His willingness to speak about the welfare of para-athletes has been equally important. Following Paris 2024, Cheah publicly raised concerns when a promised sporting incentive remained unpaid, arguing that athletes who deliver results should be treated fairly and honourably.

The issue drew wider attention to governance, transparency and equitable recognition within Malaysian para-sport.

For Cheah, supporting para-athletes means more than celebrating them when they win. It also means recognising the challenges they may face throughout – and after – their sporting careers.



Gala Premier of 'Gold', based on Cheah's real life story.



Indulging in his other hobby – fishing.



Beyond badminton and fishing, Cheah also enjoys cycling.

## Becoming the Role Model He Once Needed

When Cheah began competing, there were few para-badminton role models and no Paralympic pathway for him to follow. In many ways, he says, he had to inspire himself.

Today, the circumstances are different partly because athletes such as Cheah have made para-sport more visible.

His story reached an even wider Malaysian audience through the 2024 biographical film Gold, which explored his journey from living with Erb's palsy to becoming a world champion. Following his second Paralympic victory in Paris, the film returned to cinemas, allowing more Malaysians to understand the years of uncertainty behind the medals.

Cheah hopes young para-athletes will take from his experience the simple lesson that being different should never become a reason to withdraw from the world. He encourages them to step beyond their comfort zones, engage confidently with others and recognise that physical limitations do not determine the scale of their ambitions.

He also believes families have a role in introducing young people to active lifestyles. His own journey began because his parents made space for sport – and because his mother was willing to nurture an interest that eventually became a calling.

## Perfect Imperfection

Cheah describes his personal philosophy in two words, "perfect imperfection."

It is his reminder that nobody begins life without limitations. What matters is what one chooses to build from them.

His journey – from a nine-year-old discovering badminton, through years when the Paralympic dream did not yet exist, to two Paralympic gold medals and nine singles world titles – has helped strengthen Malaysia's standing in international para-badminton. More importantly, it has made sporting possibility more visible to a generation of Malaysians with disabilities.

As he continues pursuing new competitive goals while supporting the wider para-sport community, this 2026 Anugerah

Harapan Merdeka recipient recognises both achievement and promise in the example of an athlete who kept going long enough to see his sport change and then helped change what others believed was impossible.

*"Perfect imperfection. Nobody is perfect, but you can turn your imperfections into something that makes you proud"*



Receiving the Bintang Kesatria Mangku Negara award from His Majesty, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Ibrahim at Istana Negara.



2008  
2024



MERDEKA  
AWARD

MERDEKA AWARD  
RECIPIENTS

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Allahyarham Royal Professor Ungku Abdul Aziz Ungku Abdul Hamid**  
For his outstanding contribution to the eradication of poverty, rural economics, the development of Tabung Haji and in the field of education.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Nipah Virus Encephalitis Investigation Team from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya (Joint Recipient)**  
For its outstanding contribution to the discovery and understanding of the causes, effects and control of the Nipah encephalitis viral infection.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**The Late Datuk Leslie Davidson**  
For his outstanding contribution in the introduction of the pollinating insects *Elaeidobius kamerunicus* from Africa to the oil palm plantations in Malaysia, leading to the rapid development of the palm oil industry.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Malaysian Nature Society**  
For its outstanding contribution to the Belum-Temenggor Forest Complex Conservation Initiative.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Allahyarham Professor Emeritus Dato' Dr Khalid Tan Sri Abdul Kadir (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution to the study and understanding of diabetes and the relationship between hormones and stresses in various tissues.

2008

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Allahyarhamah Tun Fatimah Hashim (Joint Recipient)**  
For her outstanding contribution to the empowerment of women in Malaysia and for protecting and securing rights and economic opportunities for women through advocacy.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Datuk Dr Halimaton Hamdan**  
For her outstanding contribution in the development and application of Maerogel as a commercially viable multi-purpose material.

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**The Late Tan Sri Dato' Lim Phaik Gan (Joint Recipient)**  
For her outstanding contribution to the empowerment of women in Malaysia and for protecting and securing rights and economic opportunities for women through advocacy.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Professor Emeritus Dato' Seri Ir Dr Zaini Ujang**  
For his outstanding study and scholarly contributions in the various environmental initiatives concerning water supply, sewage, river rehabilitation and industrial ecology.

2009

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**The Late Datin Paduka Mother A. Mangalam A/P Iyaswamy Iyer**  
For her outstanding contribution in promoting the welfare of the underprivileged and for fostering national unity.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Professor Emeritus Dr Yong Hoi Sen (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution to the development of basic and applied knowledge of Genetics, Molecular Biology, Biological Systematics, Evolutionary Biology and Biological Diversity of Malaysian flora and fauna.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Distinguished Professor Ulung Datuk Dr Harith Ahmad, FASc (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution in research and promoting the development of photonics in Malaysia.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**The Late Tan Sri Dr Just Faaland**  
For his outstanding contribution to the advocacy of equitable growth through eradication of poverty and reduction of socioeconomic polarisation.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Dato' Dr Ar Kenneth Yeang**  
For his outstanding contribution to the development of design methods for the ecological design and planning of the built environment.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**The Late Professor Dr Mak Joon Wah (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding fundamental and applied research in parasitology and parasitic diseases, public health and pathology.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**The Late Emeritus Professor Dato' Dr Goh Khean Lee (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution in elevating the study and practice of gastroenterology and hepatology in Malaysia to global standards.

2010

2011

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to  
Science, Technology & Innovation



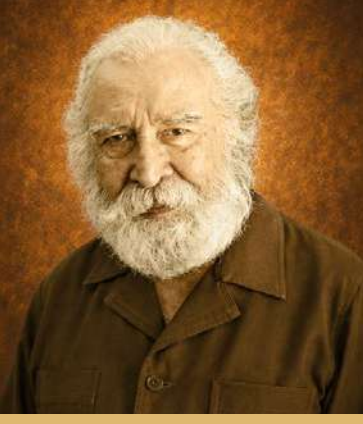
**Academician Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr Augustine Ong Soon Hock**  
For his outstanding contribution to the research and development of the chemistry and technology of palm oil and for his significant role in advocating and promoting the Malaysian palm oil industry to the world.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**The Late Dr Engkik Soepadmo**  
For his outstanding contribution to the research and conservation of Malaysia's forest plant diversity.

Outstanding Scholastic &  
Academic Achievement



**Allahyarham Royal Professor Tan Sri Dr Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas**  
For his outstanding contribution to the scholarly research in the area of Islamisation of contemporary knowledge and of Muslim education.

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to  
Education & Community



**Allahyarham Tan Sri Datuk Haji Arshad Ayub (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution in shaping Malaysia's education landscape through the development of professional education, education reforms and innovation that have resulted in education becoming more accessible to Malaysians.

Outstanding Contribution to  
Education & Community



**YM Raja Tun Dato' Seri Utama Muhammad Alias Raja Muhammad Ali (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution to rural development and rural reform through organising successful land settlement projects (FELDA) for the many landless, rural population in Malaysia.

Outstanding Contribution to  
Environment & Planetary Health



**The Late Dr Lim Boo Liat**  
For his outstanding contribution to the conservation of Malaysia's biological diversity through the study, understanding and control of vectorborne diseases and the relationship between diseases and the environment; and for advocating the protection of our natural heritage.

Outstanding Contribution to  
Science, Technology & Innovation



**Tan Sri Dato' Dr Yahya Awang**  
For his outstanding contribution to pioneering the development of clinical research and cardiac surgery in Malaysia and for his instrumental role in the establishment of the National Heart Institute (IJN).

Outstanding Scholastic &  
Academic Achievement



**Emeritus Professor Dato' Dr Lam Sai Kit**  
For his outstanding contribution to scholarly research and development in medical virology and emerging infectious diseases including dengue.

2012

2013

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Seniman Diraja Datuk Mohd Nor Khalid (Lat)**  
For his outstanding contribution to the promotion and pluralism of Malaysia's cultural identity through the use of cartoons and for the promotion of understanding and respect among Malaysia's diverse ethnic communities.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



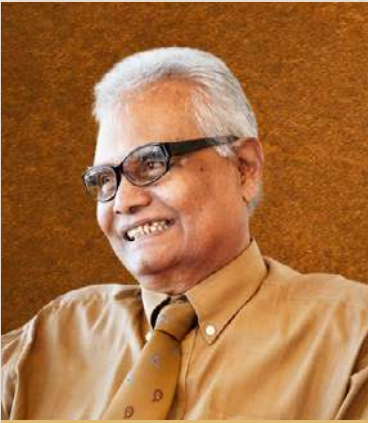
**Datuk Dr Choo Yuen May**  
For her outstanding contribution to the development of novel, efficient and green processes for the palm-based industry through research and commercialisation of various technologies.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Professor Dr Abdul Latif Ahmad (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution to the scholarly research and development of technologies in the areas of polymer science, wastewater treatment and membrane separation technology.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Mohd Khan Momin Khan**  
For his outstanding contribution to wildlife research and conservation through the setting up of captive breeding centres as well as for pioneering and successfully managing the human-wildlife conflict in affected areas.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Professor Datuk Ts Ir Dr Ahmad Fauzi Ismail (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution to the scholarly research and development of technologies for commercialisation in membrane performance for both gas separation and water and wastewater treatment.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**Dato Sri Gathorne, Earl of Cranbrook**  
For his outstanding contribution in pioneering research and conservation of Malaysia's forest biodiversity and the ecology and biology of Malaysian mammals and birds and for advocating environmental conservation.

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood**  
For her outstanding contribution to the development of humanitarian and international emergency relief.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Professor Emeritus Dato' Dr Abdul Latiff Mohamad (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution to the research and understanding of plant taxonomy and conservation biology in Malaysia.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Professor Emeritus Ir Dr Mohd Ali Hashim**  
For his outstanding scholastic contribution in the research of separation processes and water and wastewater treatment and for his instrumental role in the setting-up of the Centre for Ionic Liquids.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Emeritus Professor Tan Sri Dr Zakri Abdul Hamid (Joint Recipient)**  
For his outstanding contribution to the observation, analysis and assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services, fostering the remediation and protection of the natural environment and promoting environmental sustainability in Malaysia and globally.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Datin Paduka Dr Khatijah Mohamad Yusoff**  
For her outstanding contribution in the field of microbiology and virology through a better understanding and diagnosis of the contagious and fatal viruses in poultry and the study of the potential of the virus in combating cancer cells.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**Dr Elizabeth Lesley Bennett**  
For her outstanding contribution to the conservation and management of wetland habitats and that of endangered wildlife in Malaysia through research, advocacy and policies.

2014

2015

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Tan Sri Lakshmanan Krishnan**  
For outstanding contribution to laying the foundation for the modern film industry in the country and for his instrumental role in developing early acting talents including Malaysian film icon the late P Ramlee.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Distinguished Professor Datuk Dr Looi Lai Meng**  
For outstanding contribution in pioneering research in amyloidosis, renal pathology and cancer pathology and for her significant contributions and role in promoting the field of pathology in Malaysia and the region.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor**  
For outstanding contribution to conservation of the natural environment and forestry in Malaysia through his leadership role at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS).

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Professor Dato' Ir Dr Wan Ramli Wan Daud**  
For outstanding scholarly research and development in advancing the technology of fuel cells and hydrogen energy in Malaysia and the region.

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Dato' Dr Abdul Halim Ismail**  
For outstanding contribution and his pivotal role in establishing the first Islamic Bank in Malaysia, which led to the development and growth of the Nation and region's Islamic banking, insurance and finance sectors.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Timothy William (Joint Recipient)**  
For outstanding contribution to the effective treatment of a new cause of human malaria, Plasmodium knowlesi. The discovery has changed the way this infection is managed in the country and globally.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Allahyarham Professor Emeritus Ir Dr Masjuki Haji Hassan**  
For outstanding scholarly research in engineering and energy science and for his instrumental role in the research and development of biofuel and other sources of efficient energy and automotive engines.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Dato' Seri Tengku Dr Zainal Adlin Tengku Mahamood**  
For outstanding contribution to wildlife and forest conservation in Malaysia and the region through fieldwork, education, advocacy, policy and international cooperation.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dr Balbir Singh Mohan Singh (Joint Recipient)**  
For outstanding contribution to the discovery and pioneering work on a new cause of human malaria, Plasmodium knowlesi. The discovery of this potentially fatal zoonotic disease has changed the understanding of malaria and the way infections are treated in the country and globally.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**Professor Dr Anthony Milner**  
For outstanding contribution to research and education in Malaysian history that has shaped and promoted the understanding of the Nation's identity, heritage and culture and for his role in fostering international collaborations.

2016

2017

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Hassan Abdul Muthalib**  
For outstanding contribution as the pioneer and earliest influence in the local animation world through his folktale-inspired works and his leadership role in developing an educational framework on the artistic importance of animation in the country.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Engr Gurmit Singh KS**  
For his outstanding contribution through his activism, advocacy works and leadership role in the promotion of sustainable environment and combating climate change in Malaysia.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dato' Dr Mohd Hair Bejo (Joint Recipient)**  
For outstanding contribution and instrumental role in advancing efforts towards sustainable food production through the development and commercialisation of chicken disease vaccines in treating Gumboro disease that benefits the poultry industry in Malaysia and internationally.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dato' Dr Gan Ee Kiang (Joint Recipient)**  
For outstanding contribution in his pioneering work in developing a successful exemplary commercial model for R&D for Malaysia's universities and through his extensive work and leadership role in the fields of clinical pharmacology, pharmaceutical sciences and drug-related research in the country.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Distinguished Professor Dr Rajah Rasiah (Joint Recipient)**  
For outstanding contribution in his scholarly research and development of the theoretical macroeconomic framework in the promotion of sustainable development, by pioneering the conceptualisation, measurement and application of innovation theory and the framing of innovation policy for developing countries.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**The Late Emeritus Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dr Khoo Kay Kim (Joint Recipient)**  
For outstanding contribution to the scholarly research, development of reinterpretation of Malaysian history and lifetime dedication in the history education in the country that has shaped the post-independence study of history in modern Malaysia.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**Andrew James Eavis**  
For outstanding contribution in his pioneering works in the areas of geomorphology and cave survey through the Mulu Cave Projects with the Royal Geographical Society Expedition and the discovery of the Sarawak Chamber, leading to extended research on rainforest habitats and ecosystem and establishing international collaborations for scientific and nature expeditions.

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Majlis Kanser Nasional**  
MAKNA has provided financial, emotional and social support to nearly 60,000 cancer patients for over 26 years, without discriminating on creed, colour or ethnicity.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**South East Asia Rainforest Research Partnership**  
SEARRP has contributed to the conservation, sustainable management and restoration of Malaysia's forest ecosystem and also played an instrumental role in the education and training of Malaysian environmental scientists.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**Suzanne Mooney**  
An advocate for sustainable food systems, founder of Malaysia's first sustainable food bank that is feeding Malaysians and reducing food waste in the country.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Emeritus Professor Dr Ng Kwan Hoong**  
A medical physics pioneer whose research in radiation medicine has contributed significantly to the fight against breast cancer globally by researching various imaging methods including breast density measurement to help early detection.

2018

2020

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Teach For Malaysia**  
For outstanding contribution in influencing 330,285 students over the past decade through collaborations with 893 schools and 131 student-led initiatives with 34,676 beneficiaries.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Global Environment Centre**  
GEC has contributed to the biodiversity, river and forest conservation and restoration of Malaysia. They have played a fundamental role in the restoration of Mangrove trees in Malaysia, as well as helping over 277 community organisations and 700 schools increase their capacity to protect and restore water resources.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dato' Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman**  
For outstanding contribution towards the study, treatment and prevention of infectious diseases and HIV/AIDS for over 30 years. Her work has led to a dramatic drop in the rate of new HIV/AIDS infections by 50 per cent over the previous 10 years.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Emeritus Professor Dato' Dr Siti Zuraina Abdul Majid, FASc**  
Pioneer in Malaysia's field of Archaeology, renowned for discovering the Palaeolithic site of Kota Tampan and the Palaeolithic skeleton of the Perak Man, in Lenggong, which may be regarded as Malaysia's first "capital". Her research also established that early man's migratory route from Africa to Australia was through Peninsular Malaysia, thus putting Malaysia on the archaeological map of the world.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**Dato' Dr Annabel Teh Gallop**  
For her tireless dedication and commitment towards the international promotion of historic manuscripts written in the Malay language for the past three decades.

Anugerah Harapan Merdeka



**Samuel Isaiah**  
For his contribution as well as commitment in improving and uplifting the standard of education among the Orang Asli children and in coaching teachers to elevate the overall quality of education for all.

MERDEKA AWARD RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Dato' Seri Dr Abdul Samad Mohamed Said (A. Samad Said) (Joint Recipient)**  
For multifaceted contributions to Malay literature encompassing novels, poetry, essays, dramas and performing arts.

Outstanding Contribution to Education & Community



**Dato' Dr Faridah Merican (Joint Recipient)**  
For pioneering the nation's performing arts scene via theatre drama and media to drive social and cultural awareness and advocacy.

Outstanding Contribution to Environment & Planetary Health



**Professor Dr Joy Jacqueline Pereira**  
For effectively navigating the science-policy interface with extensive research on climate change and fostering international collaborations to safeguard environments and communities.

Outstanding Contribution to Science, Technology & Innovation



**Tan Sri Dato' Dr Abu Bakar Suleiman**  
For unwavering dedication in shaping healthcare policies and initiatives to ensure equitable and quality healthcare, especially in improving patient access to vital nephrology services nationwide.

Outstanding Scholastic & Academic Achievement



**Emeritus Professor Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram**  
For contributions as an outstanding academician, eminent economist and trusted advisor to global and local policymakers addressing pressing economic developmental issues worldwide.

Anugerah Khas Merdeka



**Dr Kathryn Anne Rivai**  
For unwavering dedication to improving education access for marginalised, stateless and undocumented children through Etania Schools, offering customised quality education and vocational training in Sabah.

Anugerah Harapan Merdeka



**Ian Yee Ngan Fui**  
For spearheading investigative journalism in Malaysia amongst youth, delivering impactful multimedia documentaries and innovative public action campaigns against social injustices.

2022

2024



## MERDEKA AWARD GRANT FOR INTERNATIONAL ATTACHMENT

Established in 2011, the Merdeka Award Grant for International Attachment was created to nurture promising young Malaysians with the potential to shape the nation's future. It provides individuals aged 22 to 35 with opportunities to undertake collaborative attachments at leading international institutions.

Through exposure to global expertise, new ideas and meaningful partnerships, grantees deepen their knowledge and broaden their perspectives in Education and Community, Environment and Planetary Health and Science, Technology and Innovation. These experiences empower them to transform learning into solutions that create lasting value for Malaysia.

More than an international attachment, the Grant is an investment in people, ideas and the nation's future. By enabling grantees to return home with renewed purpose, knowledge and inspiration, it reflects the Merdeka Award's enduring aspiration of Fostering a Culture of Excellence.



## MERDEKA AWARD GRANT

FOR INTERNATIONAL  
ATTACHMENT RECIPIENTS

# 2013 - 2025

2013

RECIPIENTS

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dr Natrah Fatin Mohd Ikhsan**  
Understanding molecular microbial ecology towards sustainable agriculture production.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dr Abhimanyu A/L Veerakumarasivam**  
Identification of molecular markers for the diagnosis, prognosis and therapy of bladder cancer through greater molecular understanding of the disease.

2014

RECIPIENTS

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dr Kamalan Jeevaratnam**  
Mechanistic insight for cardiac cellular therapy using stem cells.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dr Lim Hong Ngee**  
Nanotechnology-based blood testing to identify breast cancer.

2015

RECIPIENTS

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Chua Ling Ling**  
Association between gut microbiome dysbiosis (changes in the gut microbiome) with systemic immune activation, inflammation and early onset of age-related diseases in HIV infected individuals.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Mohd Sukor Su'ait**  
Advanced Energy Conversion and Storage Material from Malaysian Palm Oil Industries.

2016

RECIPIENTS

Education & Community



**Koh Lily**  
How Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) can strategically position themselves in the value chain in the midst of Industry 4.0.

Environment & Planetary Health



**Dr Khamarrul Azahari Razak**  
The Power of Knowledge How Prepared Are We for Disaster? The Malaysian Context.

2017  
RECIPIENTS

Education & Community



**Shahar Koyok**  
Indigenous Arts and National Narratives. A Comparative Study of Indigenous Peoples' Art and Representation within National Institutions.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Madya Dr Zetty Norhana Balia Yusof**  
The Potential of Malaysian Seaweeds as the Source of Antifungal Compounds for Application in the Oil Palm Industry.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Sophia Rasheeqa Ismail**  
Lipidomics Profiling and Risk of Early-Onset Myocardial Infarction.

2018  
RECIPIENTS

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Dr Ong Wee Jun**  
Solar Energy Conversion and Energy Storage to Address the Seriousness of Energy Security and Environmental Issues by Mimicking the Ingenuity of Nature.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Lee Tian Khoon**  
Converting Rubber Material for Advanced Energy Storage and Conversion.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Aishah Ismail**  
Stroke Prediction Biomarker through ocular blood flow using Laser Speckle Flowgraphy.

# MERDEKA AWARD GRANT

FOR INTERNATIONAL ATTACHMENT

## 2019

RECIPIENTS

### Environment & Planetary Health



**Chrishen R. Gomez**  
Conservation Genetics  
Research Fellowship for  
Development of Long-term  
Genetics Study of Sunda  
Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis*  
*Diardi*) and Sympatric  
Carnivores.

### Science, Technology & Innovation



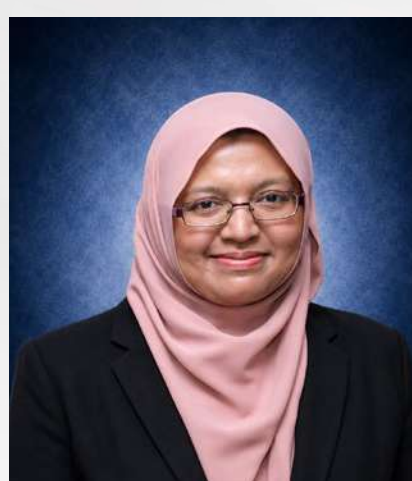
**Dr Feng Ying Xing**  
Prognosticating Work  
Productivity, Stress Level  
and Workload Capacity  
through fNIRS Brain  
Haemodynamic Signal  
Measurement.

### Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Mohd Azri Ab Rani**  
Batteries for Future; The  
Birth of Na<sup>+</sup> Batteries.

### Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Yanny Marlina  
Baba Ismail**  
Smart Material that  
Speeds Up Bone Healing.

# MERDEKA AWARD GRANT

FOR INTERNATIONAL ATTACHMENT

## 2021

RECIPIENTS

### Environment & Planetary Health



**Dr Aini Hasanah  
Abd Mutalib**  
Tracking the symphony  
using the Passive Acoustic  
Monitoring (PAM) to  
determine the occurrence,  
distribution and behaviour  
of small apes at Kenyir  
Rainforest, Terengganu.

### Environment & Planetary Health



**Dr Wan Nor Fitri  
Wan Jaafar**  
Cloning and Stem Cell  
Research in Wildlife  
Reproduction.

### Science, Technology & Innovation



**Professor Madya Dr Nur  
Adlyka Ainul Annuar**  
Peering into the Dim Heart  
of Active Galaxies-Weak or  
Buried Monster Black Holes?

### Science, Technology & Innovation



**Jessica Ooi Sui Ying**  
Paper-based device for  
Colorimetric Detection of  
Ovarian Cancer Biomarker  
miRNA-665.

### Science, Technology & Innovation



**Ir Dr Freddy Tan  
Kheng Suan**  
Design of Next-Generation  
On-Board Charger of  
Electric Vehicle using State  
of-the-Art Wide Bandgap  
Technology.

2023  
RECIPIENTS

Education & Community



**Dr Masni A/P Mat Dong**  
Reimagining Inclusive SocioEconomic Development for the *Orang Asli* In Malaysia.

Education & Community



**Syaza Soraya Sauli**  
Empowering Environmental Sustainability Values In Preschool Children In Malaysia Through Comprehensive Nature-Based Learning Modules.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Kong Xin Ying**  
Photocatalytic Upcycling Plastics as a Sustainable Energy Alternative.

Environment & Planetary Health



**Amaziasizamoria Jumail**  
Tropical Forest Ecology Restoration within a Global South Context.

Environment & Planetary Health



**Dr Ng Chuck Chuan**  
Phytoremediation - A Naturebased Solution (NbS) for Soil Heavy Metals Pollution.

2025  
RECIPIENTS

Education & Community



**Dr Dinesh Sangarran A/L Ramachandram**  
Bridging Hearts and Minds Advancing Dementia Literacy and Culturally Sensitive Medication Management in Malaysia.

Education & Community



**Dr Rasyidah Rehir**  
Enhancing Anatomical Education through Advanced Cadaveric Preservation Technique and Body Donation.

Science, Technology & Innovation



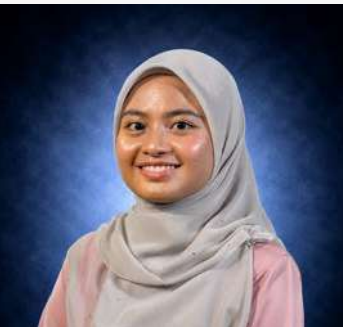
**Calvin Shee Yin Ming**  
From Taxonomy to Function Unlocking Biosynthetic Gene Clusters in the Microbiome of Nepenthes Pitchers via Functional Metagenomics.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Dr Keisheni Ganeson**  
Fabrication of Smart Microneedles Embedded with Butterfly Pea-Derived Nanoparticles for Combined Therapy and pH Sensing.

Science, Technology & Innovation



**Nur Hafizah Annezah Utuh**  
Impact of CYP2C19 Genotype-Guided Approach in Antiplatelet Therapy on Platelet Reactivity Index Among Coronary Artery Disease (CAD) Patients.



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# MERDEKA AWARD TALK SERIES

The Merdeka Award Talk Series serves as a distinguished platform for the exchange of ideas, bringing together eminent thought leaders, innovators and changemakers whose experiences and insights inspire others in the pursuit of excellence.

Through candid conversations and meaningful dialogue, the Talk Series highlights the qualities of resilience, adaptability and creativity that have enabled remarkable individuals to navigate challenges, overcome adversity and make lasting contributions to society. In doing so, it seeks to encourage Malaysians from all walks of life to embrace continuous learning, leadership and personal growth.

Addressing a broad spectrum of issues relevant to contemporary Malaysian society, the Merdeka Award Talk Series fosters greater awareness, understanding and reflection on matters of national and global significance. More than a forum for discussion, it serves as a catalyst for individual and collective action, inspiring positive change and contributing towards a more informed, progressive and resilient nation.





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Level 71, Tower 2  
PETRONAS Twin Towers  
Kuala Lumpur City Centre  
50088 Kuala Lumpur Malaysia



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