

# Star athletes shine as Unity Icons

## Badminton and darts players among those chosen by ministry

**PETALING JAYA:** Six national badminton and two national darts players have been chosen as this year's Unity Icons.

National badminton players Goh Sze Fei, Nur Izzuddin Rumsani, Wan Muhammad Arif Shaharudin, Yap Roy King, Pearly Tan Koong Le and Thinaah Muralitharan, along with national darts duo Tengku Hadzali Tengku Mustaffar and Tan Jenn Ming, have been picked as 2025 Unity Icons by the National Unity Ministry.

"Sports serve as one of the most powerful platforms to foster unity, harmony and togetherness among Malaysians.

"Each time our national ath-

letes compete on the world stage, the people, regardless of race, religion or background, stand firmly behind them, united in spirit as they cheer on the Jalur Gemilang flying high with pride," it said in a statement.

It said the national athletes have not only achieved success on the international stage, but have also set an inspiring example of how the spirit of sportsmanship can break down barriers of difference and strengthen the spirit of Malaysia Madani.

National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang also expressed his hope that all the Unity Icons will continue to spread the message of unity and sow the seeds of



**National heroes:** Pearly-Thinaah competing at the Badminton BWF World Championships in Paris, France; and (below) Sze Fei-Izzuddin posing for a photo during the awards ceremony at the India Open 2025 badminton tournament in New Delhi, India. — AFP



harmony among the people.

This aligns with the nation's aspiration to build a peaceful, harmonious and united nation.

The ministry believes that with

the spirit and commitment demonstrated by these icons, the values of unity can continue to flourish, bringing Malaysians together under one national identity.

# Global influencers to duke it out at first World Cup in Johor

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH  
farhaan@thestar.com.my

**JOHOR BARU:** Johor will be under the global spotlight when it hosts the inaugural Influencers World Cup 2025, a football tournament featuring top digital creators and social media personalities from around the world.

State youth, sports, entrepreneur development and cooperatives committee chairman Mohd Hairi Mad Shah said the event, scheduled from tomorrow until Sunday at the Sultan Ibrahim Stadium, is set to position Johor as a hub for international sports and creative culture.

Mohd Hairi said the state government deeply appreciates the leadership and support of Johor Regent Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, whose vision has elevated Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) into a powerhouse of Malaysian and Asian football.

"Tunku Ismail's continued commitment has not only placed JDT in a class of its own but also made Johor a source of pride for the nation.

"Hosting the Influencers World Cup is another milestone that reflects this progress," he said yesterday.

Mohd Hairi added that the tournament will unite influencers, digital content creators and well-known personalities from across the globe, offering more than just a football competition.

"This event is also a platform to showcase Johor as a destination for world-class sporting events, youth engagement and creative expression."

Eight teams from around the world will take part in the competition, including Argentina, Spain, England, Mexico, France, Colombia, Chile and the host nation Malaysia.

Mohd Hairi, who is also the Larkin assemblyman, added that the tournament fits in perfectly with the Johor Sport Nation 2030 agenda.

"The Influencers World Cup reflects how sports can merge with creativity and digital engagement to inspire a younger generation while boosting Johor's reputation on the international stage.

"The Sultan Ibrahim Stadium, which stands as a symbol of Johor's pride, is expected to welcome thousands of visitors from both inside and outside Malaysia throughout the tournament.

"This will not only attract football fans but also digital communities, investors, creative industry players and lifestyle enthusiasts."

Mohd Hairi added that the state government is confident that the event will help elevate Johor as a host for international events, stimulate the local economy, particularly the tourism, hotel and retail sectors, and build stronger global networks with the international creative community.

# Blessed offerings for forest-dwelling monks

By R. SEKARAN  
rsekaran@thestar.com.my

**GEORGE TOWN:** Reverence prevailed as thousands of Buddhist devotees knelt, bowed and offered food to monks during the Merdeka Alms-Giving Ceremony.

The Maha Sanghika Dana (mass offerings to the Buddhist monks) event began with a symbolic alms procession featuring 68 forest-dwelling monks at SMJK Phor Tay in Sungai Dua here.

Known as Pindapata (the practice of Buddhist monks receiving food offerings from devotees), it reflects the core values of humility, reliance on generosity and detachment from material possessions.

The monks were led by Phra Kitisobahno under the spiritual guidance of the Chief Monk of the Dhammayut Order in Malaysia and Singapore, Chao Khun Keng.

Aside from Malaysia, monks also came from Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand.

A themed tribute to 68 Years of Unity, the event was organised by the United Buddhist Order of Malaysia (Ubom) with the support of the Royal Thai Consulate-General in Penang.

Many devotees gathered from as early as dawn, lining the roads with offerings of food, robes and daily essentials.

They also prayed for peace and prosperity of the country.

Ubom adviser Datuk Seri Steven Ooi said he was deeply moved by the turnout and devotion shown.

"What made this event truly special was the eagerness of thousands who waited patiently on their knees to make their offerings," he said, adding that the entire event was carried out in an orderly manner.



**Act of humility:** Devotees placing food in the monks' bowls during the 2025 Merdeka Blessings organised by Ubom at SMJK Phor Tay in George Town. — LIM BENG TATT/The Star

Ooi said some 1,000 robes were offered during the ceremony, each representing a devotee's support of the Sangha's vow to live without attachment while continuing along the path of Dharma.

"It marked a powerful moment of collective merit-making and devotion," he added.

The robe-offering ceremony, a key element of Buddhist practice, strengthens the bond between the laity and the monastic community.

By offering robes, devotees

reaffirm their commitment to sustaining the monks' spiritual journey and their role as guides in the teachings of Dharma.

The event also featured a historic milestone with the announcement that the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand had given official approval for the setting up of the Malaysia-Singapore Dhammayut Sangha Council.

Ubom said the council, to be led by Chao Khun Keng, would deepen religious ties and cooperation between the Sangha communities

of both nations.

Adding to the significance, 12 abbots from Ubom monasteries across the country were formally appointed, a move seen as an important step in strengthening unity and leadership within Malaysia's Buddhist community.

The ceremonies closed with a dhamma talk and a merits-transference session, where blessings were dedicated to all beings.

Devotees joined the chanting in solemn unity, bringing the proceedings to a meaningful end.