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Mounted guards officially begin duty

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Army's Mounted Ceremonial Guards Unit, launched by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar in May this year, officially began its mounted guard duty at Istana Negara today.

The idea to form the unit was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Although it only officially began its duty today, the unit has been stationed at Istana Negara's main entrance on a trial basis since Nov 16.

Speaking to reporters after officiating the Istana Negara Stable Complex, Armed Forces chief Jen Tan Sri Ismail Omar said the mounted guards would be stationed at the palace only on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays from 10am to 3pm.

He said on each duty, 12 horses would be used and a changing of the guard ceremony would be carried out every hour.

There would be two horses at their posts at any one time.

The horses, costing about RM20,000 each were purchased from Poland and trained at the Sungai Buloh army depot.

Ismail said although the long-term plan was to upgrade the unit to that of a regiment to cater for the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, it could only be used for guard duty for the time being.

"This is due to the number of men and horses we have at the moment. There are plans to upgrade the unit to a squadron when we will have at least 112 men and 43 horses.

"Later, the number of men and horses will be increased to 470 and 145, respectively, to form a regiment," he said.

Ismail said the formation of the regiment under the 21st Regimental (Ceremonial) Royal Armoured Corps, meant all the King's ceremonial events would be placed under its (the regiment's) purview.

He said this would include the Royal Motorcade Escort and Royal Lance Guards, and that the plan for the unit was long term.

"When the regiment formed, it will be solely responsible for all duties related to the King.

"Plans are also afoot to build better infrastructure, procure horses and equipment and train men, in view of the expansion programme.

"This will ensure all jobs entrusted to the regiment are carried out smoothly."

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