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Grand celebration in store to mark occasion

THE Sultan of Selangor's birthday celebration this year will be one of the grandest ever held and the list of award recipients is also expected to be longer than previous years.

The fact that in the last two years the Sultan's birthday was merely celebrated with the usual special prayers at the State mosque, because the Sultan was overseas undergoing medical treatment, makes this year's celebration more meaningful for the people of Selangor.

This year, the Sultan has also consented to have the title for the recipients of Seri Paduka Mahkota Selangor (SPMS-first class award) and Seri Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah (SSSA-first class award) changed from Datuk to Datuk Seri.

This means that recipients of SPMS and SSSA awards from the Sultan, including past recipients will now be referred to Datuk Seri instead of the usual Datuk and their wives be called Datin Seri instead of Datin.

The titles for other award recipients however remained the same.

The bigger scale of celebration this year which has been planned by the State government since early last month, is not only to make up for the lack of special ceremony in the last two years, but also to celebrate the Sultan being elected as the new Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

His Royal Highness Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Alhaj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Hisamuddin Alam Shah Alhaj will be the country's 11th Yang di-Pertuan Agong on April 26, thus the ceremonies lined up for his birthday celebration this time have become more meaningful.

The Sultan, who is celebrating his 73rd birthday this year, will take over from current Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar Ibni Almarhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman whose term expires on April 25.

The election of Sultan Salahuddin was announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Feb 27 following the 182nd Conference of Rulers held at Istana Negara.

Under the Federal Constitution, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong is elected among the Malay Rulers to serve a five-year term.

The highlight of this year's birthday celebration, especially for the public who has been anticipating this for a long time, will surely be the giant fire-works display to be put up by the Klang Municipal Council on the night of March 16, coinciding with the State Banquet at Istana Alam Shah, Klang.

Although the Sultan's official birthday falls on March 13, the celebration which will be steeped in tradition and rituals, kicked off early this month with the planting of date palm trees at Pulau Indah Mosque by both the Sultan and Tengku Permaisuri Selangor Siti Aishah on March 4.

It was followed the next day by the official opening of the blue-domed mosque situated at Kampung Perigi Nenas.

The building of the mosque was personally financed by the Sultan at the cost of RM5 million.

In his opening speech, the Sultan said the mosque was his gift to the people of Pulau Indah so that he would always be remembered by them.

He also stipulated that the mosque not be used for activities other than that allowed under the Islamic teachings.

The Sultan also forbade the use of the mosque for political purposes as he said a mosque should not be used as an instrument to cause a split

within the Muslim community.

Last Sunday, a special prayer sessions to ask for blessing from the Almighty, followed by dinner was held at the State Mosque.

Even a small glitch when a ritual called "menyembah tolak bala" which literary means a ritual to dispel bad luck scheduled for March 8, had to be cancelled due to technical problem at the Dewan Singgahsana or the Throne Hall, did not dampen the air of festivity already felt by the people, especially in the Royal town of Klang where colourful bunting and flags lined all the main roads.

The event scheduled for that day was deferred to March 21.

Following that, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar also announced that all events scheduled to be held at the hall, the venue for all important events held at the palace, had to be postponed.

This included the investiture ceremony scheduled for three consecutive Saturdays beginning March 13.

The investiture ceremony for "Darjah Kebesaran" for 280 award recipients this year is 9am on March 20 for those originally scheduled to receive their awards on March 13, while those on March 20 will now receive their awards at 10am on March 27.

Those scheduled to receive their awards on March 27 however, will have to await a new date.

Last Tuesday, a special ceremony was held to commemorate the opening of the Sultan-s personal museum called Galeri Sultan Abdul Aziz at Istana Mahkota by the Tengku Permaisuri Selangor Siti Aishah.

Resplendent in green kebaya, the regal Tengku Permaisuri was the focus of hundreds of guests at the ceremony as that was the first time that she officiated at an official function in the presence of the Sultan since her appointment as Tengku Permaisuri in September last year.

Among those at the ceremony were Abu Hassan and his wife Datin Seri Wan Noor Daud, other Selangor royalty, Toh Puan Mahani Daim and members of the business community.

The construction of the museum took 10 years and it showcases over 1,500 artifacts from the Sultan-s personal collection and gifts from foreign dignitaries and interesting collectibles left behind by his forefathers.

As is the custom, the Sultan visited the Royal Mausoleum Complex in Klang where his father Almarhum Sultan Sir Hisamuddin Alam Shah and his grandfather Sultan Sir Alaeddin Suleiman Shah were laid to rest.

This year will mark the first time that the birthday march past and the inspection of the guard of honour by the Sultan to be held at the newly completed Dataran Shah Alam situated besides the MPSA Tower.

The State government and relevant agencies have been working around the clock to ensure that the Dataran Shah Alam, which was first used as a trial during the last National Day celebration, is ready for the important event.

Another event, which is a must for the Sultan whenever there is an occasion for celebration, is the golf tournament.

For his birthday this year, the Sultan who is a keen golfer, has decided on a golf tournament between his own team and a team comprising of foreign diplomats.

This tournament is scheduled at the Glenmarie Golf Course tomorrow.

On Tuesday, March 16, the Sultan will officiate at the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of an additional wing of the Tun Hussein Onn Eye Hospital in Petaling Jaya.

This will be followed by the State banquet at night at Istana Alam Shah and the much anticipated firework display.

The fireworks which will start at 8pm, will showcase 12,000 units of high-level display starshell fireworks and 5,000 shots of low-level

display ground repeaters and Roman candles.

The display to be shot from the istana, will start with the launching of a large 10-inch starshell fire-work with comet-s tail, to signal to the public the commencement of the show.

A series of salutation will then be displayed to catch the people-s attention, followed for the next 10 minutes by an awesome fire-works ensemble - the whole show costing not less than RM70,000.

After the high-level display, the show continues with between 5,000 and 12,000 shots of well-choreographed low-level display.

This will include astonishing variations of the special fireworks called Roman candles, spit-firing patterns of the repeaters and awe-inspiring beauty of the ones called the mines and crosettes.

Just seconds before the low-level display finishes, the high-level display will once again be fired.

For the finale, the MPK has decided to use massive quantities of large calibre shells with rapid-firing sequence to project waves after waves of colours and reports to cover the whole night sky.

On Thursday, March 18, the Sultan is scheduled to spend a day with the people of Sungai Tenggi Felda Land Scheme in Hulu Selangor.

He will launch a special trust fund named after him on March 20. Among others, the objective of the fund is to provide aid to rural people to improve their lives, education grant to needy students and to promote the growth of socio-economic projects in rural areas.

The Sultan will throw a tea party at Padang Mahkota, Istana Alam Shah on March 21 and on March 23, he and Tengku Permaisuri will visit the Selangor and Federal Spastic Centre in Petaling Jaya.

The month-long celebration will culminate on March 31 with a barbeque to be hosted by the Sultan at Istana Bukit Kayangan, Shah Alam.

Aside from the month-long celebration, the people of Selangor can look forward to another historical event later in April - the sending off of the Sultan and Tengku Permaisuri who are taking over as the new Yang di-Pertuan Agong and Raja Permaisuri Agong on April 26.

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