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Special train takes King and Queen home

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah were given a grand send-off this morning after ending their five-year reign as the country's 10th King and Queen.

In a ceremony at Parliament Square, the King inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 104 officers and men of the 1st Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment, under the command of Mej Abdul Basit Abdul Rahman.

Also on duty, for the first time in the ceremony's history, were mounted units from the Royal Malaysian Police and City Hall.

Tuanku Ja'afar and Tuanku Najihah were earlier met on arrival by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali before proceeding to the royal dais.

The national anthem was then played while a 21-gun salute was fired.

Also present at Parliament Square were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, his wife Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, Chief Justice of the Federal Court Tun Eusoff Chin, Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail and Dewan Negara President Tan Sri Mohamed Ya'acob.

The King and Queen, accompanied by Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah, later bade farewell to Cabinet Ministers, members of the diplomatic corps and other dignitaries before leaving for the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station to board their royal coach for the journey back to Negri Sembilan.

The royal couple were accompanied to the station by Dr Mahathir, Abdullah, other Cabinet Ministers and their spouses.

Members of the public, schoolchildren and other well-wishers lined the ceremonial route and also crowded the station to wave and bid them goodbye as well as a safe journey.

Accompanying Tuanku Ja'afar and Tuanku Najihah on the special six-coach train service back to Negri Sembilan were Mentri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad and Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha.

Tuanku Ja'afar is succeeded by the Sultan of Selangor Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, who has been appointed the 11th Yang di-Pertuan Agong by the Rulers' Council.

His five-year term begins on Monday and ends on April 25, 2004.

Later in the afternoon in Seremban, a grand official ceremony was held to receive Tuanku Ja'afar and Tuanku Najihah.

The couple arrived at 12.45pm at the Seremban Railway Station.

The grand ceremony, held outside the railway station, was attended by the Undang Luaks of Sungai Ujong, Jelebu, Rembau and Johol, Tunku Besar Tampin, members of the royal family, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad, executive councillors and heads of department.

The ceremony started with the playing of the national anthem amidst a 21-gun salute.

The King then inspected the guard of honour put up by 103 members of the Royal Signals Kor led by Major Indrajit Singh.

Witnessing the ceremony were about 3,000 members of the public including school children and shoppers at the Seremban Parade shopping complex located opposite the railway station.

With the conclusion of the ceremony the royal couple were feted at a State lunch at the Allson Klana Resort at 1.40pm.

The official arrival of the couple at the Istana Besar Seri Menanti at Kuala Pilah was celebrated at 3.45pm.

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