

19/10/2000

## Broken regality of Kelantan palace

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THERE is something about the Kelantan palace that makes it different from the rest of the royalty in the peninsula.

For one, it has always had a knack for stirring controversies, seeming to thrive on these.

Most Kelantan Umno leaders have blamed the trouncing they got at the hands of Pas and Semangat in the 1990 general election on the palace's support for the opposition.

The Sultan supported the opposition for the simple reason that Semangat's president then, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, was his uncle.

The Sultan's power base is the state civil service where appointments of top posts in the Kelantan administration must be with his consent.

Unlike rulers of the other states, the Kelantan Sultan enjoys such powers because the State was one of the non-federated Malay states during colonial rule and the State Constitution has such provisions.

Rulers of the other non-federated Malay states of Kedah, Perlis, Johor and Terengganu can also exercise this provision but they seem to have relinquished that right to their Menteri Besar.

The Kelantan Sultan has however jealously guarded the provision and has never shied away from exercising it whenever the need arose.

That was then.

In 1996, Razaleigh decided to disband Semangat and its members rejoined Umno en bloc. With that, hopes rode high among Umno supporters that they could give Pas a run for its money come the general election.

The palace, which had been hostile to Umno since Razaleigh left the party after losing the presidency to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1987, warmed up to Umno and its leaders.

However, in the 1999 general election, despite Razaleigh leading the Umno brigade in Kelantan, the party failed to make any inroads.

Prior to that, the palace had made known its displeasure with Pas and Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat with a disagreement over the appointment of top state civil servants.

The fact that Umno and Razaleigh failed to break Pas' stranglehold on the State despite having the backing of the palace was attributed to Pas' ability to ride on the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue well.

None can dispute the fact but the question that comes to mind is whether the palace has lost its prominence in shaping the State's political direction.

While observers pondered over this, some 500 people decided to demonstrate in front of a hotel in Kota Baru, protesting an event held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the state administrative officers' function. The Sultan was the guest of honour.

The demonstration, believed to have been organised by Pas supporters, was to express displeasure that the function had Nora, a popular local singer, performing.

The demonstrators were of the opinion that the ban on performances by female artistes, which was imposed after Pas took over state rule, should apply to all, including the Sultan.

The demonstrators seemed to have legitimate grounds to feel unhappy about the different set of rules - one for the common folk and another for the higher-ups.

There is also a debate on whether the ban is a wise move, but such

discourse has been going on since the ruling was imposed.

But of more significance here is the readiness of Pas supporters to protest against the Sultan who had always been revered in the State.

Before this, Pas leaders, including Nik Aziz, had always spoken highly of the Kelantan Sultan, as being religious and committed to the cause of the people.

Such glowing descriptions of the ruler have however been on the decline, especially with the fallout between Pas and Semangat.

With that established, it is actually not surprising that the Kota Baru demonstration took place. The question is whether the low regard Pas has for the palace now is shared by the rest of Kelantan.

If the answer is no, then Pas has taken on a dangerous foe which can, in a matter of time, make huge dents in the party's armour in Kelantan.

If the answer is yes, then Kelantan is probably joining other Malay states where the rulers are restricted to being titular heads as provided for in the Constitution.

Meanwhile, it should be interesting to see how "all the King's horses and all the King's men" try to put the broken regality of the Kelantan palace together again.

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