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King who touched the hearts of many wherever he went

Ahmad A. Talib

HIS Majesty Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah al-Haj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Hisamuddin Alam Shah Alhaj touched many hearts when he was the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

I had the opportunity of making Almarhum's acquaintance and found him to be a most friendly and tolerant person.

Almarhum was very much a rakyat's King and this had endeared him to his subjects.

When news of his demise on Wednesday spread, the Gleneagles Intan Medical Centre became the focal point for people from all walks of life. By the time I got there, the hospital courtyard and foyer were full of people.

I spoke to a lady in the lobby who waited patiently to pay her respects.

Dressed in baju kurung, she said she had come to visit a friend in the hospital's intensive care unit.

However, when she heard that the King had died, she decided to wait. If she could not go to the palace to pay her respects, at least she could do it at the hospital, she said.

A nurse who had finished her duties insisted on staying back until after the King's remains had been taken home.

The lobby was filled with people waiting patiently. Policemen who were on duty had an easy time maintaining order.

When Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other VIPs arrived, it was obvious that everyone was visibly affected by the death.

To everyone's credit, news of the death was greeted with dignity - there were no hysterical displays of sadness or grief. At the hospital, and later elsewhere, it was also clear that everyone felt a sense of loss.

Outside the hospital, the crowd was getting bigger. Many people were passing the news to their friends and relatives via handphones.

The more discreet ones were seen sending text messages.

Soon, the hospital area was packed with members of the public trying to catch a glimpse of His Majesty's remains.

I recalled the few times I had met the Almarhum. Once, I had the opportunity of joining him for a cup of tea in Morib with a few other friends.

The Almarhum was very jovial and told us stories about how he loved to go into the kampung to meet the people.

According to him, the people would often tell him stories of their hardships or difficulties in getting scholarships for their children, the need for housing and better roads and how some elected representatives failed in their jobs.

The Almarhum shared with us stories of his younger days when he was a student in London. He would laugh loudly when he recalled his student days when he was a junior to Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, our first Prime Minister who died on Dec 6, 1990.

On another occasion, I was asked to join him for tea in Shah Alam. After our discussions, the Almarhum insisted I try the various kuih laid out. It was obvious that he wanted his guests and his subjects to be at ease in his presence.

Almarhum Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah al-Haj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Hisamuddin Alam Shah al-Haj did that very well throughout his term as the Sultan of Selangor and later as the country's 11th King.

May the Almarhum be blessed by Allah and may his soul be included in the company of other blessed souls. Al-Fatihah.

* ahmad@nstp.com.my

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