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The People's King

AS the nation mourns the passing of Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah al-Haj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Hisamuddin Alam Shah al-Haj, his subjects will always remember him as "the Ruler with the soul of the people". He was installed as the 11th Yang di-Pertuan Agong in 1999. The King, who celebrated his 75th birthday in June, performed his duties outstandingly with dignity and honour.

As a Ruler who placed the interest of his subjects, the nation and Islam above all else, he was anxious that the mosque should not be used for political purposes or as an instrument to cause a split within the Muslim community. Nor did he want the Malays to be torn asunder by political differences, a plea he made during a visit to Kampung Baru in the Federal Capital soon after his installation.

As the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, he got on well with the centre. He understood scrupulously the constitutional scope of his duties. True to his role in maintaining unity, he did not allow the palace to be dragged into politics. Nor was he demanding. An attribute cherished by the Government was his ability to listen to advice from the Council of Ministers. This, too, endeared him to the people.

He was a very informal and modest man. And a keen golfer too. His love for Selangor was only rivalled by his love for the country. This and his personal relationship with Tun Razak whom he trusted absolutely, apparently tipped the balance in his decision to cede a huge swathe of land to the Federal Government for the establishment of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur on Feb 1, 1974. And this he did over the objection and reservations of certain powerful politicians in the State. Then later, as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong he again ceded a piece of estate for the construction of Putrajaya. In this instance, too, there was opposition. But he prevailed because of his friendship and faith in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Sultan Salahuddin's contributions to Selangor will always be remembered. He was the guiding force behind the transformation of a modest State into a modern entity. This is his legacy. He saw to the execution of development programmes undertaken by the State Government and was always on hand to offer advice when it was sought by local leaders.

His contribution to the development of Islam in the State includes the construction of the magnificent four-minaret Selangor State mosque in Shah Alam. He was instrumental in the construction of the new court building. The King's ability to get down to the core of an issue was one of his outstanding characteristics. In his more than four decades as Ruler, he had always expressed his views freely and frankly. He was known not to mince words when it came to criticising government departments which were slothful in implementing policies and programmes especially those that benefit the people.

His dedication and personal interest in the welfare of the rakyat saw him venturing into the hinterland to evaluate for himself the conditions and needs of the people. He had never relied on official reports alone. His concern for the sick once made him offer the palace, Istana Alam Shah in Klang, to be used as a hospital if the Selangor State Government was unable to complete the construction of the General Hospital on time. During the water crisis in 1998, his compassion for the people prompted the State Government to draw up concrete measures to tackle the problem.

Such was his desire to serve the people and to aim for excellence in its services. Such was his affinity with the people. Indeed, he will be remembered as the people's King.

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