

Sultans' political sword cuts both ways
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In a constitutional monarchy, it is said that the sovereignty officially lies with the crown but that Parliament (in its role of the peoples' representative) holds the true political power except in extraordinary circumstances in which the former might be looked upon for a more active participatory role.
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Naturally, such suggestions are double-edged swords, as the only criteria for the monarch is an appropriate genetic code. This would naturally lead to opinions as diverse as the individuals themselves; from the active promotion of democratic reforms by Bhutan's Wangchuk monarchy to the role of the monarchy in the ascendancy of Fascism in pre-World War Two Italy.

It is with this background in mind that one should approach the recent 'political empowerment' of the monarchy of the states of Terengganu, Perlis and Kelantan.

To highlight a recent event, sections of the rakyat and the opposition party applauded the measures taken by the Sultan of Terengganu in installing his choice of the state's menteri besar, but as Machiavelli aptly pointed out in his political thesis *The Prince*, the king, with or without a legislative, must be careful with his liberality in the sense that, if given too much freedom, the country will take him for granted and eventually throw a fit when they do not get what they want.

For example, it has been said that the Sultan can reject the appointment of a menteri besar on any basis that displeases His Royal Highness, even if said menteri besar commands the support of the majority of the Senate (as in the state of Terengganu).

More importantly, this can be done without the need for any justification to the rakyat, who (as voters) are the most important stakeholders in the entire electoral process. This would be an act that is against the very nature of a democratic ideology and arguably the start of a descent down a slippery slope.

As Sultans are human beings like the rest of us, it is more than likely that they too are susceptible to the frailty of the human condition. It is natural therefore to assume that mistakes might be made; mistakes that might go unchecked if measures to ensure non-partiality and non-discrimination were non-existent.

It is not surprising then that the same cheerleaders of the active involvement of the Sultan of Terengganu were rather disquieted by the comments made recently by the Crown Prince of Kelantan with regards to inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia.

But if one goes by precedence, then His Royal Highness has every right to make such statements, and if he so chooses to do so, it would be within his rights to appoint political figures with similar ideologies to positions of power within his state.

If the rakyat envisions a more political role for the monarchy, then we should be made fully aware of the potential ramifications of such an act. Similarly, the rules of the game should be modified to ensure that there will be greater transparency in decision-making processes

that affect the rakyat (from the rationale behind accepting or dismissing locally-elected wakil rakyat to the business dealings of members of the royalty) and to also ensure that no potential miscarriage of justice will go unpunished.

It is entirely reasonable to expect the monarchy to regain its role in the politics of today. As the philosopher Immanuel Kant theorised, 'A republican form of government, forma regiminis, is one in which the executive power of the government as such is separated from the legislative power; it is characterised by freedom, by dependence on a common constitution, and by equality. It is hence perfectly possible, for a monarchy to be republican in form'.

With this view in mind, it is essential that ambiguities in state laws are done away with and that they are updated to suit the needs of today's rakyat.

Therefore, the agenda for change that is being lauded by the Pakatan Rakyat should not only include the judiciary and executive, but also actively address the role of our monarchy in the changing political landscape of our country.

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