

ESTABLISHED ON DEC 1, 1957

# CUSTODIAN OF MALAYSIA'S HISTORY

NST-16/9/2020  
Pg. 12

The National Archives keeps, preserves country's important documents, materials



AZDEE AMIR

KUALA LUMPUR

**N**ESTLED in a quiet, unassuming area off Jalan Duta in Jalan Tunanku Abdul Halim, the National Archives of Malaysia houses numerous important, priceless documents and materials pertaining to the country's rich and diverse history over the years.

As Malaysians celebrate the country's independence from colonial rule each Aug 31 and the formation of Malaysia on Sept 16, another date remains a key one for the officers and staff of the National Archives.

On Dec 1, 1957, the same year Malaya gained its independence,

the archives was set up, with a small team of only six people.

Fast forward to the present day, the National Archives now has 580 staff nationwide, led by director-general Datuk Azemi Abdul Aziz, 59, who has diligently served for 36 years and counting.

Azemi said all over the world, archiving is a widely respected, trusted institution that keeps, preserves and protects important documents and materials.

Such institutions, he said, keep very important documents and materials that provide vital information on the background and identity of the people, society, cultures, communities and the country.

"Without the archives, which provide valid records and information, people will be lost and not know their origins or history.

"As custodians, our duty is to protect and preserve such documents and materials," said Aze-



National Archives of Malaysia director-general Datuk Azemi Abdul Aziz showing the agreement in Kuala Lumpur recently on the formation of Malaysia which was written in Jawi. PIC BY FATHIL ASRI.

mi, who took over as director-general in 2014.

The National Archives, he said, differs in functions and purposes from a museum, which primarily keeps, protects, preserves and displays historical artefacts, while the former primarily keeps and protects documents and materials, which are also released from time to time for displays and exhibitions.

Among the most important documents kept in the secure and tightly guarded vaults of the National Archives are the Declaration of Independence from 1957, the Rukun Negara from

1970 and the agreement on the formation of Malaysia from 1963.

Also of note are Sultan Abdul Hamid's letters of correspondence to the then British colonial authorities, written in Jawi, which received recognition and certification from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organisation.

During a recent visit by the *New Straits Times* to the National Archives in conjunction with Malaysia Day, Azemi provided a rare firsthand glimpse of the original document on the formation of Malaysia, which is usually kept under lock and key in the main vault, also known as the "strong room".

Azemi said the staff, as custodians, are responsible for all key documents.

Such documents, he said, are only taken out every once in a while either for inspection for the purpose of preservation, or for special exhibitions.

"When we handle such documents and materials, we do so with extreme caution and care by wearing gloves and in an air-conditioned, almost dust-free environment, such as this closed hall.

"Here we have three types of storage.

"First, the strong room or vault, which is where such vital documents and materials are kept.

"There is also the normal repository where other documents and materials are stored, and the special repository for audio visual

materials, such as films, photographs and old picture reels."

He said for the vault and normal repository, the temperature is maintained between 20°C and 22°C with a relative humidity level of between 52 and 60 per cent, which is vital for prolonging the life and preservation of such documents and materials.

The special repository has a temperature of 18°C or less.

Azemi said the National Archives has a special laboratory with trained technicians who carry out periodic maintenance and preservation work on all the documents and materials.

He said the institution is spearheading efforts for transformation management of records and historical information to become the country's best centralised source for research.

"We are also focused on digitising and making high-quality resolution copies of the documents and materials so that they can be shared with the public, whom we hope will make more use of the National Archives in the future for learning, research or just to know and find out more of curiosity."

