

## **Royals have a strong institutional sway**

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**By Zainul Arifin**

### **CONSTANTS IN THE FLUX: Rulers have stayed true to their role as political neutrals**

THE new king is to be installed today. It is, of course, a unique tradition that began in 1957 when nine state hereditary rulers got together and elected a supreme ruler -- the Yang di-Pertuan Agong -- to ceremoniously lead the new nation.

The post is to be rotated every five years, except in the event of a royal passing. Incidentally, good health and longevity gave our new king the unique situation of being there twice. Daulat Tuanku.

Yet, in these days and age especially, there is the tendency for some to argue the relevancy of having a monarchy at all, which is, of course, a crime. Many republicans, closet or otherwise, have cloaked their arguments in democratic theories and principles when discussing the relevance of the monarchy, and perhaps even its anachronistic nature.

Of course, all the functions of governance have been taken over by politicians and technocrats, even on issues like the Malay rights and matters pertaining to Islam. But even then, the royal households have a strong moral as well as institutional suasion over the issues.

The various constitutional amendments of the 1980s and 1990s may have allowed the Executive to push through legislation or decisions, with or without royal consent, but yet this hardly happened. There is a sense that consultations with the palace, and their subsequent concurrence, assent and consent go a long way.

Our sultans, too, stand as constants in the, at times, tumultuous political flux in the country. The fact that governments from both sides of the political aisle have been able to exist and function with their respective state rulers suggests that the royal houses have stayed true to their role as political neutrals.

Some, however, may point to Perak with allegations that the palace was complicit with the Barisan Nasional for the latter to stage a coup that saw a mid-term change in government in 2009.

That is, of course, an unfair attempt to drag the palace into politics. I believe a lot of what happened was lost in the fog of politics.

Not many, for instance, knew of the palace rejection in the early hours of March 9 of an initial attempt by some BN politicians to push for the formation of a minority government based on the shaky argument that the DAP, Pas and PKR triumvirate was yet to be formalised and individually they had fewer elected representatives than the BN.

Not many knew the role of the palace in safeguarding the citizens' choice by insisting that it first ascertain if indeed the three parties were coming together and had commanded a simple majority and thus the legal and moral right to govern, which they eventually did.

And by the same token, the palace was there to ascertain that the said government was no longer sustainable due to desertion among its ranks, and that subsequently it had lost the legal and moral right to continue to govern.

Yet opinions come from varied angles, and there were at least two sides of the arguments put forth by legal adversaries. That is why there is the court of law, which upheld the legitimacy of the new Perak government.

Yet, the incident, which also saw the overnight birth of millions of constitutional experts, saw ugly incidents on the streets, in the courts, state assembly and Parliament with an undisguised murmur about the relevance of the monarch.

With hindsight, and if we were to be fair in our interpretation of events and history, the consistency of the royal house prevented politicians' own interpretation of the Constitution from running roughshod.

Our royal houses have also adapted well to the new realities of a modern democracy. Regardless of the various constitutional amendments made, as some would suggest, to curtail the power of our rulers, over the years they have grown to understand their roles and functions.

Our royal institution is more than a mere symbol of our parliamentary democracy, and also acts as a conscience for the nation when politicians and their ilk could be obsessed in the quest for power. As in many other countries, the institution is clearly not undermined.

Furthermore, for king and country has a nice ring, too, doesn't it?

Daulat Tuanku.

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