

Private secretary is among closest subjects of Ruler
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HAVING spent the past two decades with Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, Datuk Paduka Syed Unan Mashri Syed Abdullah holds the distinction of being among the closest subjects of the Ruler.

The principal private secretary to the Sultan of Kedah says what struck him most about the Ruler was his punctuality.

"Tuanku Abdul Halim attends all functions as scheduled as he does not like to keep people waiting. He really takes the trouble to arrive on time," Syed Unan said in an interview.

Another highlight of Tuanku Abdul Halim is the focus he places on education, he added.

"The Tuanku has never failed to attend events at primary and secondary schools in the state. He has kept up with this for over 50 years.

"He also attends events to encourage students at higher learning institutions such as the Kolej Universiti Insaniah and Politeknik Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah," he added.

Syed Unan, who had served as Kedah State Secretary from 2004 to 2009, said generosity was another outstanding trait of the King.

"Tuanku has personally awarded aid to underprivileged students in order to give them hope for a better future," he added. As an old boy of the Kolej Sultan Abdul Hamid, Syed Unan said it was no secret that Tuanku Abdul Halim loved going back to his alma mater whenever there was an occasion to grace.

He said the King was also the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Chancellor and under his guidance, UUM had become a renowned management university in the region.

Reading is also a prowess of Tuanku Abdul Halim, according to Syed Unan, adding that the Ruler would always pick up books whenever he went overseas.

"I would list patience as also among Tuanku's key virtues. He is one who never loses his cool.

"If he feels that something is not right, he will ask about it. Tuanku is a very temperate person," he added.

Datuk Syed Harun Al-Jaffree, 85, who served Tuanku Abdul Halim as private secretary from 1969 to 1976, remembers the Tuanku for his lovely jawi handwriting.

"Tuanku would write his minutes in jawi and it was very neatly done," he recalls.

“I first met Tuanku when we were students at Kolej Sultan Abdul Hamid. I was a senior at the school and a prefect and we stayed at the same hostel.

“The Tuanku would mix around with other students and dine at the same hall as the rest.

“I only met him again when I was an assistant district officer later on. He still remembered our times together,” he added.

Syed Harun recalls that when Tuanku Abdul Halim was appointed Yang di-Pertuan Agong for the first time, he did not follow the entourage to Istana Negara.

“However, I was regularly summoned to Istana Negara to brief Tuanku on state matters,” he added.

Syed Harun said Tuanku Abdul Halim also stressed on religious matters and graced many religious events held in Kedah.

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