

Defining a monarch's duties
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As King, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah is a symbol of Malaysian unity.

AS head of state, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong wears many hats but the one that endears him the most to his subjects is of him being the symbol of unity.

Despite having different views, beliefs and opinions, Malaysians irrespective of their race, religion and political affiliation, look up to the King with utmost respect, love and admiration.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong is not just a person elected to the supreme post from among the Malay Sultans, but an institution that makes Malaysia a unique country.

The office was established in 1957 when the Federation of Malaya (now Malaysia) gained independence. The creation of this institution was proposed by the Reid Commission, based on an idea by first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra who came up with it after observing the system adopted in Negri Sembilan.

The current and 14th Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, who is also the Sultan of Kedah, was installed on April 11 this year. His reign began on Dec 13, 2011 after his election by the Conference of Rulers.

His installation was in line with the provision under Article 32(1) of the Federal Constitution which among other things, stipulates that:

"There shall be a Supreme Head of the Federation, to be called the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who shall take precedence over all persons in the Federation."

Universiti Malaya's Faculty of Arts and Social Science senior lecturer Dr Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad said while the role of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong was largely ceremonial, him being the symbol of unity and that of Islam, was crucial.

"The King unites the people. He is responsible for the well-being of the rakyat. As head of state, he is duty bound to look after, protect and love his subjects irrespective of their race, religious beliefs and political inclination.

"No other person in the land can be the symbol of unity apart from Tuanku," she said.

Dr Noor Sulastry said one reason why the King is a symbol of unity is because of his "independent and neutral position", pointing out that it would be difficult for politicians to be in the same position.

She said the uniqueness of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's position was also the reason why he was accepted by both the Malays and non-Malays alike.

"The people, regardless of race, religious background, culture or beliefs, feel honour bound to accord respect and recognition to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

"True, he is a Malay King and a Muslim, but in terms of nationhood, he is the King for Malaysia and its people," she said.

Tuanku Abdul Halim previously served as the fifth Yang di-Pertuan Agong from 1970 - 1975, making him the first ruler to hold the position twice.

He is also the first King to take up residence at the new Istana Negara in Jalan Duta.

During his first reign, Tuanku Abdul Halim was the supreme head of the country at the time when Malaysia was just getting out of a turbulent period and political instability following the riots on May 13, 1969.

It was also the time when the change in the country's leadership took place - from the first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman who also happened to be his uncle, to the second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

Coincidentally, he is now the Yang di-Pertuan Agong at a time when Razak's first son, Datuk Seri Najib, is the Prime Minister.

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