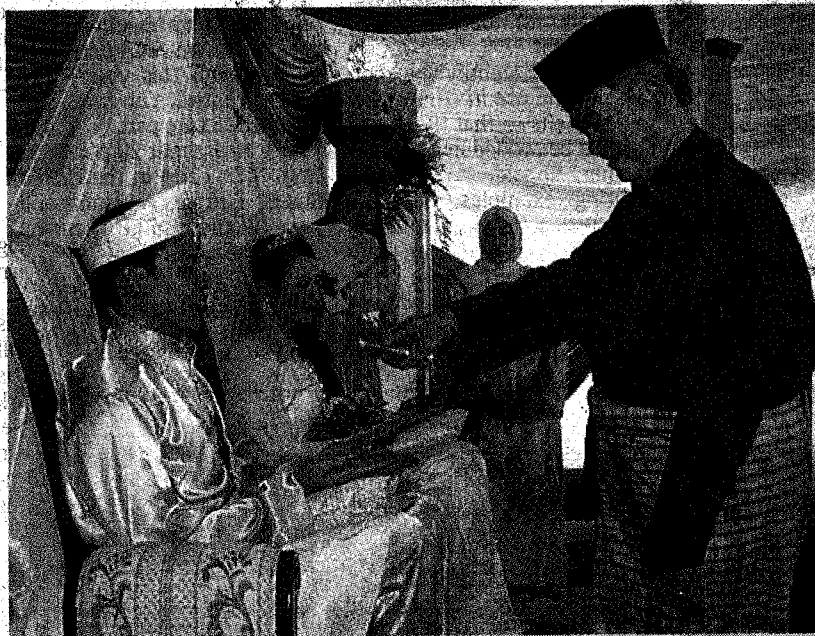


Love that unites a nation



PRIME BLESSING: Abdullah sprinkling scented water on the bride and the groom in the *menepung tawar* ceremony.

BY SIMON KHOO

TEMERLOH: Love unites. This age-old maxim that brings lifelong bliss to couples and knits families together holds true for the nation too.

Love for the country is the force that unites all Malaysians, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"There shall be no fear of one another. We can eat and sleep together under one roof," he said before hundreds of guests at a wedding reception of his special assistant Mohd Najib Yusof at the SK Kampung Bolok in Lanchang, near here, yesterday.

Mohd Najib, 31, who works at the Umno headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, married 26-year-old Amy Fazlina Abu, from Teluk Kumbar, Penang. The bride works in the Umno overseas clubs secretariat at the same place.

It is learnt that Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal had a hand in bringing the couple together.

Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob was among those who attended the glittering ceremony that saw the couple seated on a dais atop an elephant from the nearby Kuala Ganda elephant sanctuary.

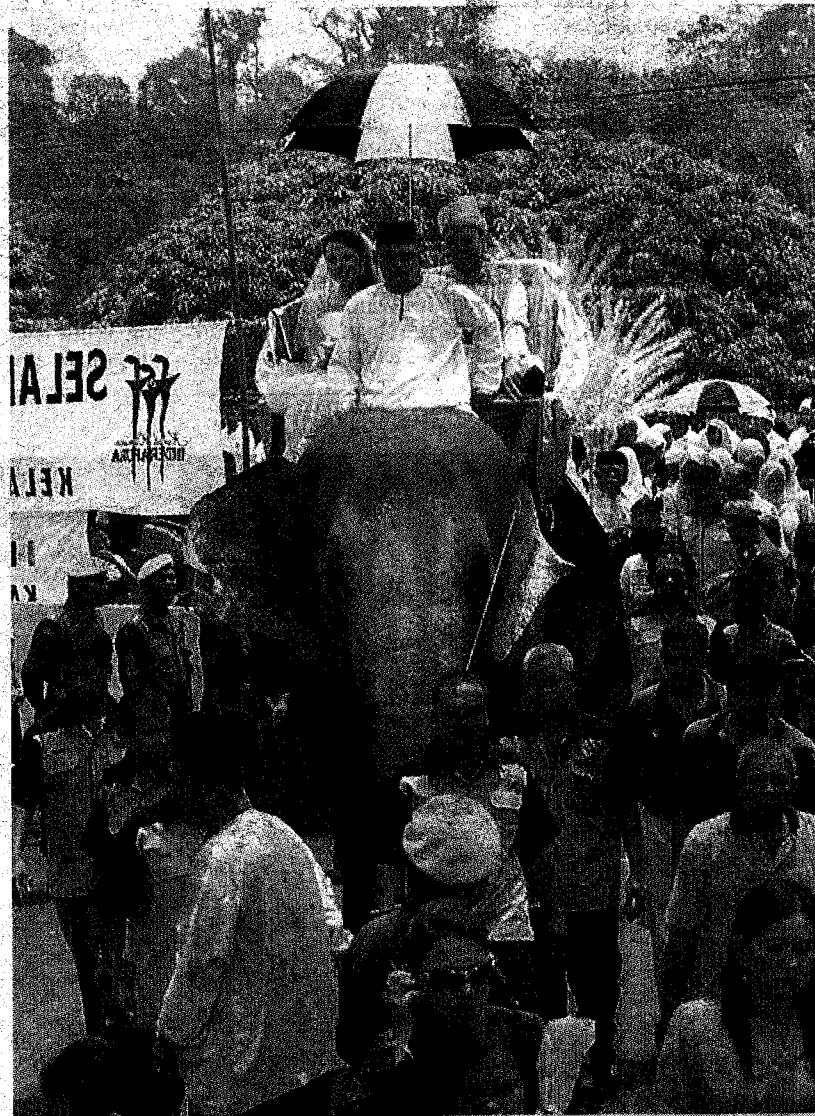
Pahang state executive councillor Datuk Mohd Sharkar Shamsuddin who mooted the idea of an elephant leading the wedding procession got the sanctuary to loan one of the animals there for the event.

"The international community has long recognised and acknowledged Malaysia as a multi-racial country," said Abdullah in his speech.

"All Malaysians, regardless of race, have contributed immensely to the country's growth and development.

"As such, the unity we enjoy today must be preserved to ensure our people continue to live in peace and harmony."

Turning his attention to the wedding reception, he told the crowd: "It is wonderful to see people of all races rallying together to prepare for the occasion.



JUMBO RIDE: The bride and groom making a grand entrance on a dais atop an elephant as they lead the wedding procession.

"I was told that many parties had chipped in to make this ceremony a success."

He said that this *gotong-royong* spirit and other noble values that Malaysians steadfastly held to must not be lost.

"It is our identity and the way of life of our people," he said.

This spirit of togetherness and helping one another, he added, must be maintained at all times.

"Look around us. There are so many countries with racial conflicts and fighting taking place. In Malaysia, we do have some minor squabbles but we are quick to resolve the problems."