It's curtains for Istana Negara

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END OF AN ERA Palace to be officially decommissioned today

KUALA LUMPUR

After a colourful 83-year history and the coronation of seven of the 13 Yang di-Pertuan Agong in its premises, the curtain comes down on Istana Negara today.

The majestic white edifice with gold-coloured domes, a familiar sight to those passing Jalan Syed Putra, will be officially decommissioned when the head of state's flag is lowered in a ceremony steeped in tradition today.

And concurrently, the grand new Istana Negara in Jalan Duta is the official palace for Malaysia's future king.

Outgoing Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin will go down in history as the last head of state to occupy the palace here.

This was where prime ministers, cabinet ministers, and chief justices took their oath of office.

This was where senior diplomats received their appointment letters to serve Malaysia overseas and where foreign diplomats were received.

Remarkably, this palace, located on 11.3ha land on Bukit Petaling started off as a mansion of a wealthy Chinese businessman, Chan Wing.

Built in 1928, its admirable architecture is the work of Swan & McLaren, a leading British architectural firm then.

Chan was said to have lived with his family there until World War 2, when the Japanese army occupied the place.

After the Japanese occupation ended, the mansion was bought over by the British Malayan administration.

It's size, beautiful edifice, rooms, and the commanding view it provided has impressed many, including former Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Sir Hishamuddin Alam Shah, who first made the mansion his palace.

In 1957, the Federal Government bought the place and turned it into the official palace for the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong , Tuanku Abdul Rahman Tuanku Muhammad.

And ever since, it had been the abode for Malay rulers who took turns every five years to become the head of state.

The throne room, Balairong Seri Utama, came about much later and so the coronation of the earlier heads of state were held at Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman in Jalan Ampang.

Sultan of Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah had the honour of going through the first coronation ceremony here in 1980.

The new Istana Negara will see the coronation of the 14th Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah of Kedah, next month.

The RM800 million palace is a fitting recognition to the unique constitutional monarchy system practised successfully since independence.

The old Istana Negara is set to be the museum of royalty, illustrating how the constitutional monarchy evolved. **Bernama**