

NEW STRAITS TIMES

Sultan Muhammad V
of Kelantan is His Majesty
the King

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*The 15th Yang
di-Pertuan Agong*

MALAYSIA'S 15th Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V is a comparatively young man of 47. Born Tengku Muhammad Faris Petra in Kota Baru, Kelantan, His Majesty takes an old, traditional institution dating back many centuries into a post-industrial world of high finance, quantum physics and space exploration. The nation is on track to reach its 2020 target of a fully developed country, a high-income economy and a mature democracy and as monarch, educated in both secular and religious disciplines at prestigious institutions in the west, His Majesty is more than able to grasp the intricacies of governance as guardian of its institutions in the interest of all Malaysians.

In Pas-dominated Kelantan, as head of Islam, he has seen fit to delineate politics from the religion by ensuring that laws under the jurisdiction of the syariah court are first tabled before the Kelantan Islamic Religious and Malay Council, and debated there. And only once approved are they sent to be debated and promulgated into law by the state legislature, thus ensuring that it is not politics that takes precedence in spiritual matters. He is reputed to be a pious man, concerned to understand the depth of the religion he leads through study. It will not be surprising then if His Majesty takes an active part in matters of religion to lead from the back rather than be led, bearing in mind his multi-ethnic and multi-religious subjects, united in their diversity. The latter is clearly manifest in Kelantan, a state with a dominant Muslim majority where non-Muslim communities thrive free from harassment.

His Majesty is an all-rounder — he rides horses; plays golf, football and badminton; shoots; is an archer; and, bowls. His spirituality is also shared with his subjects. Reputedly, he visits mosques around the state and prays with the rakyat. To be closer to his people, he has held walkathons in Kota Baru and is always joined by several thousands, with the last held at night. That did not deter his subjects. There were still thousands willing to walk along with the sultan. His Majesty must, too, have a gentle nature given that he keeps horses, cats, chickens and birds as pets, even while assiduously attending to affairs of state.

As with the other Malay rulers and governors, his birthday is, too, a time to honour those who have served the state. But, Kelantan's service to Islamic scholarship has always been a little unique. With its numerous pondok schools, which the sultan makes a point to visit, his familiarity in this respect has meant the inclusion of those within that educational system in his birthday honours list. His distinction, therefore, is his strong orientation towards the spiritual welfare of his subjects. That said, his philanthropic ways are in no dispute. Recently, he gifted houses to 38 flood victims. Naturally, he is very popular among his subjects. This popularity will transcend state boundaries in the five years ahead when he rules as the king, given this track record.

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