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LEADER

Yang di-Pertuan Agong is head of state

The monarchy is in place to provide checks and balances, and protect the rights of the people

YESTERDAY, the 15th Yang di-Pertuan Agong was installed. A young man of 47, he symbolises the historical continuity of the country, the colonial powers notwithstanding. For, despite the centuries of colonisation, the royal households from which the king is chosen remains a centre of power within the states. Sultan Muhammad V, as Malaysia's king, is reputed to be a man of pious inclination, making him a suitable head of Islam within the states not under the Malay rulers. That he is religious is assurance for non-Muslims because Islam holds respect for other believers paramount, as the Quranic dictum of "no compulsion in religion" proves. However, as an institution of governance outside the ambit of representative democracy, the monarch's powers are proscribed. Hence, the term constitutional monarch.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong possesses various powers and shoulders multiple functions. Most of all, the king has the duty and responsibility to preserve and protect the country's sovereignty. This is probably the most meaningful and vital function of the institution of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong for an independent and sovereign nation.



Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V kissing the Quran that was presented to him by Datuk Paduka Maharaja Lela Major-General (Rtd) Datuk Mamat Ariffin Abdullah during the installation ceremony at Istana Negara yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG'S INSTALLATION

CEREMONY STEEPED IN ROYAL MALAY CUSTOMS

Indeed, the Federal Constitution speaks of the king's discretionary powers, for instance, the dissolution of Parliament. This is done by convention on the advice of the incumbent prime minister. Given that the Malaysian Constitution was fashioned closely after the British constitution, a convention is deemed as having the force of law despite the peculiarity of Britain's unwritten constitution. This, in turn, necessitates an interpretation of "discretionary power" as that which cannot overwhelm the will of the people as expressed at general elections. Even a hung Parliament does not provide much leeway for the king's personal preference as he is obligated to appoint the person able to put together a majority voice in Parliament.

The legal technicalities of the Constitution make the king, outside his position as head of Islam, as head of state, and not head of government. As head of state, he is the commander-in-chief and, hence, he appoints the chief justice of the Federal Court and the other Federal Court judges, the president of the Court of Appeal and the judges of the High Courts, on the prime minister's advice; and members of the Public Services Commission and other commissions are also appointed by the king, again, on the advice of the prime minister. And, many other important appointments, including the auditor general and the senators, but always upon the advice of the prime minister.

Under some circumstances, the king consults with the Conference of Rulers; however, the prime minister who embodies the majority will cannot be overruled. While it is designed as part of the check-and-balance mechanism of governance, the monarch comes into his own only when a general election does not produce a clear outcome. This, in effect, makes the monarchy the most important institution when the country faces political uncertainty. His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong then matters, very much: unelected, he is neutral.

800 guests, including Malay rulers and their consorts, witness colourful ceremony

KUALA LUMPUR

SULTAN Muhammad V was installed as the 15th Yang di-Pertuan Agong at Istana Negara here yesterday for the next five years.

The installation ceremony, steeped in royal Malay customs, marked the formal commencement of his tenure as the Supreme Head of the Federation, which reflects the constitutional monarchy practised in the country.

Sultan Muhammad V took his oath of office on Dec 13.

He ascended the throne to succeed Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah of Kedah, whose term ended on Dec 12.

Some 800 guests witnessed the colourful and glorious ceremony, including the Malay rulers and their consorts; the representatives of the Malay rulers; the Yang di-Pertuas Negeri; Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor; and, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and his wife, Datin Seri Hamidah Khamis.

Also present were ministers, heads of government depart-

ments and foreign diplomats.

The sound of trumpets and the beating of drums by the *Gerandang Besar D'Raja Kelantan* band reverberated in the *Balairung Seri* of the palace to the tune of *Raja Bertabal* as soon as Sultan Muhammad V took his Oath of Installation.

This was followed by three shouts of "*Daulat Tuanku*" led by Datuk Paduka Maharaja Lela (Grand Chamberlain) Major-General (Rtd) Datuk Mamat Ariffin Abdullah.

After that was the firing of a 21-gun salute and the playing of the national anthem *Negaraku* by the Royal Malaysian Air Force band.

Earlier, the ceremony started with Sultan Muhammad V making an entrance to the *Balairung Seri* to the accompaniment of the blowing of trumpets and beating of drums by the band, playing the tune *Raja Berangkat*.

His Majesty wore the official dress of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, called the *Muskat*, which is made of black wool and em-

broided with gold thread, as well as the *Dendam Tak Sudah* headgear, or *tengkolok*, and embroidered pants.

His Majesty also donned the Royal Buckle, or the *Pending Diraja*, which is made of gold and decorated with rubies, with an engraved centrepiece featuring the federation crest, while the belt is made of heavy ribbed silk and embroidered with floral motifs in gold thread.

Pinned at His Majesty's waist was the *Keris Pendek Diraja*, which was forged from the blades of antique keris. The hilt and sheath are made of ivory embedded with gold.

Sultan Muhammad V was then ushered to his throne, marking the start of the installation.

The Grand Chamberlain then sought consent from His Majesty to begin the ceremony and made the announcement.

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Page 1 pic: Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V kissing the 'Keris Panjang Diraja' during his installation at Istana Negara yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

