

THE Monarchy IN Malaysia

Dr. Tan Chee Khoon



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DEDICATION

This book is gratefully dedicated to my parents
the late Tan Chin Ghee and Tay Kim Siew
who have sacrificed so much for their children
and to whom we their children owe so much

PREFACE

The idea of writing on the monarchy in Malaysia came to me after the election of Sultan Iskandar of Johore as our Eighth Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. The average Malaysian knows precious little about the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. Tan Sri Shariff Ahmad has tried to rectify that in his recent book "To Sire With Love" which touches on the life of the Seventh Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. After the election of the Eighth Yang Di-Pertuan Agong I thought of presenting the new King — the man, his views on various issues and his role as a constitutional monarch etc to the Malaysian public. This little volume seeks to present him to the foreign reader as well. The new King has been presented in the foreign press almost as an ogre. Nothing can be further from the truth and I hope this booklet will correct the misconceptions that the foreigner may have of him. True, he still has an irascible temper but it should mellow with responsibility and age.

Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoon

FOREWORD

It would be utterly presumptuous for me to attempt to evaluate either the subject or the object of this booklet. I conceive my humble role as being more like that of an old friend sending off an author who is carrying a fine basket of goods.

Readers' sensibilities have been so dulled by the overpraise and insincere froth produced by public relations writers, otherwise known as the 'hidden persuaders', that it has become difficult to praise something in simple terms. The following articles need no paeans of praise since their intrinsic quality should be immediately apparent to the discerning reader. They represent the best pieces of one of Malaysia's favourite commentators. They deserve to be set in this more permanent form because they really need several readings. The

more one reads, the more one discovers about the writer and his Royal guest.

On one occasion I have described our intrepid author as the scorer who has now become the score keeper.

As one of those not too popular intellectuals, I could remind Malaysians who are avid fans of the weekly, "Without fear or favour", that pamphleteering was in fact the precursor of modern journalism. In England, Addison and Steele fearlessly published their "Spectator" during the early part of the eighteenth century. Their penetrating essays have now become an integral part of English literature. Throughout the nineteenth century during the great social ferment in Europe, which we now call the Industrial Revolution, pamphlets and booklets were regularly showered on the masses of readers who had just become literate.

This is an excellent tradition for us to develop. I congratulate Pelanduk Publications for bringing out these articles so soon after their publication in the Star.

Some cynics may say that the publication is motivated by a hot market rather than by altruism. Yet, that is exactly what, "privatization" is all about.

I have succumbed to the temptation of gilding the lily and propose to add a few words to the noble topic that follows.

In every generation, wise men have offered advice to rulers be they kings or presidents or even dictators. Most of the time these good words have fallen on deaf ears. This is partly because one of the weaknesses of those who reach the top of the pyramid is that they become surrounded by sychophants who seek to gain influence by shielding their masters from unpleasant realities. This tendency can be reinforced by another human weakness described in Lord Acton's dictum, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". This is precisely where the commentators and interviewers have a valid role to play, if the media and the licensers will permit them to do so.

In this context it would not be out of place to remind Muslim readers and others who are interested, of the views of one of the great Muslim philosophers, Al-Ghazali, who lived between A.D. 1058 and 1111 (i.e. the Fifth Century of the Muslim Era). Incidentally, he was a professor from Khurasan who taught in Baghdad around the beginning of the eleventh century. Occasionally, he too was an academic

fugitive from the tyrants and bigots of his time.

Al-Ghazali said, that if a king rules justly, does good to his people and shows mercy to the victims of injustice, his subjects are under an obligation to obey him, love him and never to rebel against him.

Al-Ghazali's views are derived from a greater document than any written constitution. The Holy Quran as explained in English has the following words:

“O ye who believe, obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those charged with authority among you”. (Surah IV. 59)

At this point I am valiantly resisting the inclination to make further commentaries on the concept of the monarchy, or should I say monarchies in Malaysia, because this is my friend's book about the Sultan of the State from where I come and it is about one who is now our D.Y.M.M. The Yang Di-Pertuan Agong.

Nevertheless, by way of a complementary gift to the readers, the author and perhaps with due respect, to the Royal personality of these essays, I shall submit a few thoughts, running

along a different track, about the subject of monarchism in Malaysia.

Linguistically, it is both symbolic and symptomatic of Malaysian history and the Malaysian way of life, that we have been able to draw on several sources for terminology to express the monarchical concept. There is the word "Raja" which is of Sanskrit origin. There is *Sultan* which is derived from Arabic. This is sometimes associated with the suffix *Shah*, which is Persian. Of even greater interest, is the possibility that the term, "Agong" is of Javanese origin.

Focusing my field down a bit, the Royal title to the throne of Johore has evolved from *Temenggong* to *Sri Maharaja* to *Maharaja* and is currently "Sultan".

Does not all this reflect the pluralistic nature of our culture and worldview?

Writing about such high matters, one feels as if one is walking on egg shells while wearing jogging shoes. I am slightly emboldened by the adage that knowledge is always helpful. After all the University that I serve and which Tan Chee Khoon was a member of its Council for many years from its establishment in Malaysia, bears the motto, "Ilmu

Punca Kemajuan” or, ‘Knowledge is the source of Progress’.

Let me conclude with a quotation from the final lines of Kipling’s poem entitled, ‘IF’. (Incidentally, the full poem deserves to be read by all young Malaysians.)

“If you can talk with crowds — and keep
your virtue, Or walk with Kings — nor lose
the common touch,

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt
you. If all men count with you, but none
too much

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
And — which is more —

YOU’LL BE A MAN, MY SON

5th May 1984



UNGKU A. AZIZ

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THE EIGHTH KING OF MALAYSIA

On the 9th February 1984, Sultan Iskandar Shah Al-Haj of Johore was elected the Eighth Yang Di-Pertuan Agong by his fellow Rulers. The election of our King has become a little more complicated since it was first held in 1957 when the Yang Di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan was elected to be our first King. Originally it was a straight forward election, from a single list. But as time went on, a double list was introduced. The state that had its Ruler elected as the King goes to the second list and those in the second list would not be considered until the first list was exhausted. Any Ruler who refuses to be considered for election goes down to the bottom of the list. He has to wait his turn until those ahead of him have been considered. In this way the only two states whose Rulers had not been elected King are Perak and Johore.

It was the prospect of either of these two strong willed Rulers coming to Kuala Lumpur as the Eighth Yang Di-Pertuan Agong that sparked off the recent Constitutional Crisis. The central government was afraid that the presence of a headstrong and strong willed Ruler as the Eighth Yang Di-Pertuan Agong in Kuala Lumpur might give rise to difficulties with the Federal Government; hence the introduction of the Constitutional Amendments. But it did not know that it was stirring up a hornet's nest and opening a Pandora Box. Happily that episode has been settled.

When on 1st February 1984, His Royal Majesty the late Sultan Idris Shah passed away and that virtually gave the Rulers a Hobson's Choice on 9th February 1984. But contrary to what most of us had expected, His Royal Majesty Sultan Iskandar Shah of Johore was elected King by a narrow margin and the new Sultan of Perak, His Royal Majesty Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah was elected Timbalan Yang Di-Pertuan Agong.

The institution of an elective monarchy is unique in Malaysia. It was the brain child of Yang Teramat Mulia Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj who at the time of Merdeka was the Prime Minister of Malaya. At that time

Malaya had nine Rulers and two former colonies which had no monarchs. The new born Federation of Malaya had to have a federal head of state. To elect one of the nine Rulers as head of state would give rise to difficulties amongst the brother Rulers. So he hit on the happy solution of having an elected King who would hold office for five years at the end of which period he would retire as King and return to his state as Ruler. This way this country has seen seven Kings since 1957 and come 26th April 1984 the Eighth will start his reign.

This system of an elected King, reigning for five years at the end of which he retires, is peculiar to Malaysia. No other country has such a system and I must say that our system has worked well in that there has been no quarrels amongst the Rulers over the election of one of them as King. The succession has been smooth and orderly. Except for minor difficulties the Kings who have gone before have lived up to the expectations of the people, and what is most important the relations between the King and his government have been cordial and smooth.

On the surface of things the election with only nine voters is a simple procedure and should not take long. But although the procedure is

a simple one, the election of both the King and the Deputy King takes almost an hour. The reason is that extreme care is taken to see that the whole procedure is kept absolutely secret and that there is no possibility of any of the participants knowing how his brother Rulers voted. After the Rulers have voted and the ballot papers are counted in the full view of all the Rulers the result of the election is made known to all the Rulers present. The whole procedure is then repeated for the election of the Deputy King. The result of the election is then conveyed to the Prime Minister who announces it to the nation. Before the Rulers disperse the ballot papers are then burnt to ashes in the full view of the Rulers present.

Offhand I believe the Swedish Parliament more than two centuries ago offered the crown of Sweden to Marshal Bernadotte, one of Napoleon's Marshals. He accepted it and the House of Bernadotte has ruled Sweden for more than two centuries and is still ruling in Sweden. The late C. B. Fry, a great cricketer and all round athlete was at one time offered a crown but he declined.

Sultan Iskandar Shah Al-Haj ibni Almarhum Sultan Ismail, who is 52 years old, comes from Johore, whose Rulers have been

strong-willed, headstrong, impetuous and fiercely independent. It is no secret that at the time of Merdeka the grandfather of the present Sultan, Sultan Sir Ibrahim, had second thoughts about joining the Federation. His state was one of the richest. It was one of the richest state amongst the states of the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States. It had its own armed forces, namely the Johore Military Forces. Today his grandson, the present Sultan, is the only Ruler who has own private militia as his personal bodyguard. Another feature of the Johore Sultans is their longevity; the father and grandfather of the present Sultan have lived to be octogenarians.

Sultan Iskandar Shah Al-Haj was born on 8th April 1932. He is one of the two sons of the late Sultan Ismail; his younger brother is Tunku Bendahara Tunku Abdul Rahman. He was educated first by tutors and later entered the Ngee Heng English Primary School in Johore Bahru. Then he was transferred to Sultan Abu Bakar College after which he continued his education in Australia and Britain. On his return he made the rounds of Government offices in Johore in order for him to gain experience. Amongst other places he worked were the District Office, Land Office and

Treasury. He was installed as Tunku Mahkota or Crown Prince, on 8th May 1959 but after two brushes with the law in 1961 this position was given to his younger brother Tunku Abdul Rahman, and he himself was made the Raja Muda of Johore. However, on 29th April 1981, he was re-appointed the Tunku Mahkota and twelve days later his father passed away and he was proclaimed Sultan of Johore.

The Sultan of Johore is an avid sportsman and, like most of the members of the Royal House of Johore and Pahang, he is an expert polo player. He is also a skillful windsurfer. His other interests include golf, tennis, boxing and parachuting. He is also probably the only Ruler to fly light and medium range planes and helicopters as well.

Like a few of his brother Rulers he loves to be with his people and he visits them often. He attends Friday mosque in all the districts in Johore and also delivers sermons as well, which is quite an achievement for a Ruler. He takes an interest in the welfare of the Orang Asli in Johore. I do hope that when he ascends the throne in Kuala Lumpur he will continue to maintain his interest in the Orang Asli — surely one of the most deprived classes in our society. It will give them great hope and encourage-

ment that their King takes a genuine care in their welfare as well.

The new Deputy King, Sultan Azlan Muhibuddin Shah Ibni Almarhum Sultan Yusuff Izuddin Ghafarullahu-lahu was proclaimed Sultan of Perak on 3rd February 1984 following the death of Sultan Idris Shah on 1st February 1984. He was born in Batu Gajah on 19th April 1928 and went to the Government English School there before proceeding to the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar. He then went to Nottingham University where he obtained his LL. B. He was called to the English Bar in 1954 and then returned to Malaya where he served for one year as the Assistant State Secretary, Perak.

He then climbed slowly up the legal and judicial services. In 1963 at the age of 37 he was elevated to the High Court making him the youngest judge in the British Commonwealth. Thereafter his rise was rapid. In 1973 he was made a Federal Court judge and in 1979 he was elevated to the post of Chief Justice. Two years later, in 1983, when Tun Suffian retired from the service the then Tan Sri Raja Azlan Shah succeeded him as Lord President.

But fate intervened; while he was working

up his way in the legal and judicial services *passu* he was slowly moving up the succession in the royal house of Perak. On the death of the Raja Muda in London in August 1983, the then Tun Raja Azlan Shah was elected Raja Muda and on the death of the late Sultan Idris Shah on 1st February 1984, Raja Tun Azlan Shah was proclaimed Sultan of Perak on 3rd February 1984. Six days later, he was elected the Deputy King. That is a measure of the faith that his brother Rulers have in the former Lord President now His Royal Majesty Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah Ghafarullahu-lahu.

I still remember vividly the scathing remarks he made against a former Menteri Besar of Perak on a charge of corruption. Raja Azlan Shah, then only a high court judge, did not mince his words and told the highest politician in his own state that he was thoroughly ashamed of him, the ex-Menteri Besar from his own state, and that the ex-Menteri Besar was a disgrace to his state. As a judge, His Royal Majesty Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah Ghafarullahu-lahu has maintained the highest tradition of the judiciary by his impartially and lucid judgements delivered without fear or favour.

I came to know him when I served under him

in the Higher Education Advisory Council. It was but fitting that he should be awarded the Doctorate of Literature by both the University of Malaya and the University of Science, Malaysia. He is also an active and ardent sportsman. Coming from Perak, the home of many of our hockey greats, it is fitting that he should be the President of the Malaysian Hockey Federation and also the Vice-President of the International Hockey Federation since 1982.

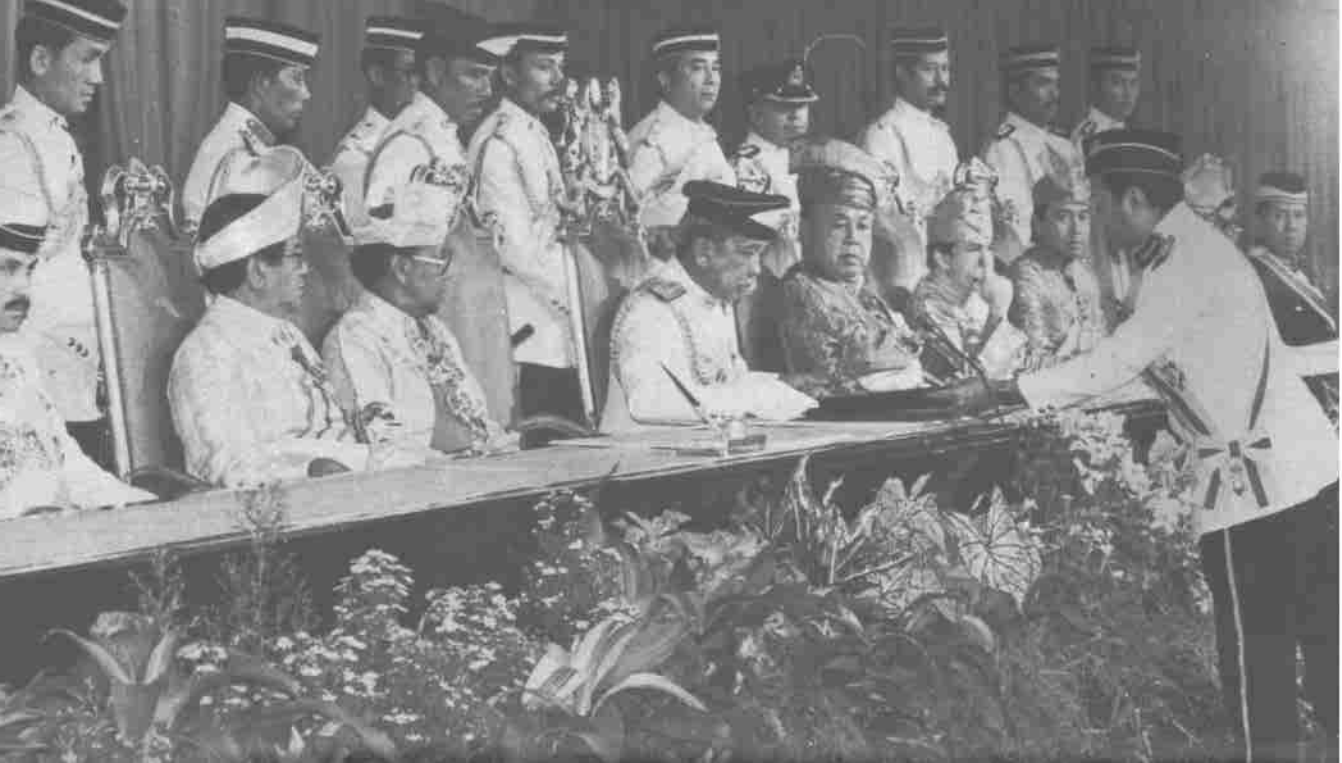
Many have expressed the fear that with the election of Sultan Iskandar Shah of Johore as the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong sparks would fly. I myself have stated that nothing of that sort would happen. I myself feel and say that the combination of the strong willed Sultan of Johore as King and the judicial expertise of the new Sultan of Perak is a good one. If the new Agong is in doubt about what he is doing is constitutional or not he can always turn to his deputy whose advice will be backed by almost thirty years of service in the law. I am confident that both the Federal Government and the new King know where their parameters of power lie and I am sure that both sides will do their best to avoid clashes which will only mar the fair name of Malaysia and bring our country into disrepute.















THE KING AND I

On Wednesday 11th April 1984, I was granted a royal audience by the Sultan of Johore, Sultan Iskandar ibni Almarhum Sultan Ismail, at the Istana Iskandariah which had been the residence of His Royal Majesty for the past two decades. Soon after he was elected to be the Eighth Agong I had written to him seeking an audience so that I could interview him before he ascended the throne of Malaysia on 26th April 1984. Just before the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) was due to meet at Desaru, Johore, I received a phone call from Datuk Sulaiman, Chief Protocol Officer to His Royal Majesty, informing me that His Royal Majesty had granted me an audience. The date was later fixed as 11th April 1984 at noon to be followed by lunch with His Royal Majesty and family. I was naturally elated at the honour and opportunity accorded to me to pre-

sent the views of the Eighth Agong to the Malaysian public. A verbatim report of the interview will appear in my column in the Star Newspaper next week. In this article I propose to set down my impressions of the Eighth Agong as a family man.

Before my wife, eldest son, grandson and I were guided to the Istana Iskandariah, we were first invited to the Istana Besar which is almost next door to the Hospital Besar, Johore Bahru. Here is housed the memorabilia of the recent ancestors of His Royal Majesty, particularly those of his great grandfather, Sultan Abu Bakar, who ascended the throne in 1856. Sultan Abu Bakar's decorations from Great Britain, Italy, Prussia and Eastern countries as well, have all been well preserved in glass cases for posterity. The royal regalia of the three predecessors of His Royal Majesty have all been carefully preserved and arranged. In another room were the cutlery of Sultan Abu Bakar, made of platinum, gold and silver. All these relics of the past must be worth millions at today's prices but of course they are priceless to His Royal Majesty and to the nation.

On arrival at the Istana Iskandariah, we were met by Tengku Ahmad. He has white hair with a golden tinge, a distinguished bearing

and courtly manners as befits the father of two Sultans, Sultanah Tunku Zanariah and her elder sister, Tuanku Nora the consort of the late Sultan Ismail. He is 74 years old and been to the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, where amongst his contemporaries were Dr Said bin Mohamed, first elected Menteri Besar of Negri Sembilan, and Datuk Hussein, father of Tun Hj Abdul Razak. He comes from Kota Bahru, Kelantan, and has served as District Officer in Pasir Mas. One of his sons was the late Tengku Zaid who served as Member of Parliament with me in 1964 on the PAS ticket. He has a daughter, Tengku Noorasiah of UMNO who was Member of Parliament for Tumpat in 1969. Tengku Ahmad assured me that the political differences of his children did not extend into the family circle which is what it should be. Alas, none of my six children, although they hold political views, have descended into the political arena.

While we were waiting for the Sultan, we met Sultanah Zanariah, a former beauty queen. She not only has beauty but a lively brain as well. Her eldest daughter is Tunku Mariam who is doing a law course at the National University of Singapore. Two of the Sultan's older daughter have also passed the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM)

and were about to go for a tertiary education when they were asked to help out in the business enterprise set up by their father. His Royal Majesty had to give up his business enterprises when he succeeded his father as Sultan in May 1981. Also present at the audience was the Tunku Mahkota, Tunku Ismail, the eldest son of the Sultan and the heir apparent. He has been trained at Fort Bragg and Fort Benning, both defence colleges in the United States of America. At the former, which is in North Carolina, he trained with the Green Berets which is an elite unit in the United States army. He also wore the parachutist wings and has done a little training in law and business administration, also in the United States of America. He is a qualified helicopter pilot.

When His Royal Majesty arrived I introduced myself and my family and we got down immediately to the business of the interview which surprisingly was over in less than an hour. His Royal Majesty put me completely at ease and I was completely at ease and relaxed as well. There was a minimum of protocol and those who read the verbatim report of the interview will know. Before going south, I consulted an old Johore hand now resident in Petaling Jaya as to the sort of reception I could

expect in Johore Bahru. He told me to relax as I would find the Sultan friendly and warm and easy to interview. I would be put completely at ease and on arrival at the Istana Iskandariah. As soon as I met the Sultan I soon found that what my friend in Petaling Jaya has said was true. The Sultan has had a boisterous and chequered career studded with a few brushes with the law as he himself admitted during the course of the interview. He acquired notoriety even before he ascended the throne but he would prove the prophets of doom wrong.

In judging the present Sultan of Johore, soon to be our Eighth Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, let me very briefly sketch the history of modern Johore. In 1855, Temenggong Daing Ibrahim formed the first Johore government. He was succeeded by his son Wan Abu Bakar in 1856 who became the first Sultan of Johore and laid the foundation of modern Johore. Sultan Abu Bakar ruled for 39 years and when he passed away at the age of 65 years in 1895, he was succeeded by his son, Sultan Ibrahim. His reign lasted 66 years, which is longer than that of Queen Victoria, the longest British ruling monarch, and he passed away in 1959 at the ripe old age of 87 years. He was succeeded by his son Sultan Ismail who reign-

ed till 20th May 1981 when he passed away at the age of 86 years and was succeeded by the present Sultan Iskandar ibni Al-marhum Sultan Ismail.

One important characteristic that the present Sultan inherited from his fore-fathers was a fiercely independent spirit and also an impetuosity and impulsiveness that has often got the family into trouble in the past. The Tunku (Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj) in his column in the Star Newspaper described the Sultan as a man of known admirable qualities. He is generous, friendly and affectionate. But, said the Tunku, he also takes offence easily and in the heat of the moment he is capable of doing things which he would regret afterwards. He is also an active man full of bright ideas but with unpredictable temperament. For this reason, he is considered somewhat erratic and impetuous, but he is a man of principles, and as such, he will not forget his duty as the constitutional monarch! His grandfather too was fiercely independent and impetuous as well. He was said to have balked at the idea of joining the Federation of Malaya. I am sure that the two decades he spent in the wilderness has made him more mature, humble and taught him the virtue of humility and kindness especially towards the poor and under-

privileged.

As he told me during the interview, the one lesson that his grandfather, Sultan Ibrahim, impressed on him is that the Sultan of Johore must be the SERVANT of the rakyat of Johore. He reigns only to serve the people. If he lives up to what he said during the interview, the rakyat jelata of Malaysia need not be anxious over the coming reign of the Eighth Agong, Sultan Iskandar. His Royal Majesty has lived for more than half a century and has acquired a few eccentricities which, unfortunately, have been magnified by the mass media. He has travelled extensively throughout his state of Johore and has visited the villagers in their kampungs. He has brought hope and cheer to his subjects during these visits and they in turn have remembered him with love and affection. In particular, he has visited the Orang Asli in their kampungs and they have reciprocated by calling him FATHER, a special term of respect and endearment and His Royal Majesty has richly earned that respect and love. One side effect of his visits to the four corners of his state is that His Royal Majesty also preaches to his Muslim subjects at the district mosques on Friday. In this, His Royal Majesty must surely be unique amongst his brother Rulers for he must be the only Malaysian Ruler

to preach to his subjects at their mosques.

Though His Royal Majesty is a religious Muslim and well versed in the Quran, he is also extremely tolerant and liberal towards other religions. Land has been readily allocated to the building of non-Muslim places of worship and I am confident that His Royal Majesty will not tolerate any discrimination against other religions in this country while he is the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. I am confident too that he will not step beyond the confines of a constitutional monarch. His behaviour in this respect will be correct, punctilious and probably exemplary. But let no one try to tread on his powers as a constitutional monarch for he is bound to retaliate.

After the interview was over, we were invited to have lunch with the royal family. During lunch, I had the opportunity to have a further talk with His Royal Majesty, his eldest son, Tunku Mahkota Tunku Ismail and his father-in-law, Tengku Ahmad. I did not have the good fortune to have met Tengku Ahmad before. Apparently his father might have succeeded to the throne of Kelantan. He himself had a large family of ten children which included the two Sultanahs of Johore, Sultanah Tunku Nora, and the present Sultanah Tunku

Zanariah, Tengku Noorasiah bt Tengku Ahmad, the Member of Parliament for Tumpat, Tengku Zaid of PAS and Member of Parliament for Pasir Mas.

The Sultan of Johore is, of course, the only ruler to have a private army, the 250 strong Johore Military Force of which the Sultan is the Colonel-in-Chief. Hence, he is often seen in his Colonel's uniform and indeed he often arrives for functions in uniform and flies his own private helicopter. Johore is, of course, probably the richest state in the Federation although Perak and Selangor may want to dispute that. But I think I am right in saying that the Sultan of Johore is certainly the richest Ruler in the Federation, most of it inherited. The Royal House of Johore has expensive chunks of real estate in Singapore. In Johore itself, it has large chunks of real estate as well.

In his years in the wilderness, the present Sultan also started logging and sawmill firms and other business enterprises which are now being handled by his two elder daughters. Like the Royal House of Windsor, the Royal House of Johore is exceedingly rich and does not have to wait for handouts either from the State or Federal government — one of the reasons why the Sultans of Johore have been fiercely in-

dependent. They can be financially independent of the State and Federal Governments.

The reign that is about to unfold before us will be one of peace and prosperity for Malaysians of all races, colour and creeds. There may be some hiccups as is to be expected from a Ruler of fifty-two years but they should not mar the even tenor of his reign.

To sum up, the audience that I had with His Royal Majesty was an interesting and fruitful one and should be of interest to both the government and political scientists.

INTERVIEW WITH HIS MAJESTY SULTAN ISKANDAR OF JOHORE

Dr. Tan: How do you see the role of Constitutional Monarchy in Malaysia, and your role as the future King?

Tuanku: I can only speak with regard to Johore. I shall never interfere with the legislature. The legislature elects the Menteri Besar; I appoint him once I am satisfied that he has the backing of the ruling party. In Johore, there is no difficulty in this as there is no opposition party in the State Assembly. As a constitutional monarch, I shall do the same over there (Kuala Lumpur) as I do over here: that is, I shall never interfere with legislation or in the legislative activities of Parliament.

Dr. Tan: In a Constitutional Monarchy, the ruling party elects its leader, and the monarch calls upon him to form the Government.

Tuanku: Yes. I call in the leader with the majority in the House to form the Government. This was what happened in Johore after the last general election in 1982. The ruling party presented me with a list of office bearers in the State Government, and I approved it.

Dr. Tan: As you are aware, there has been, in the past, a little misunderstanding, I think, on the part of some of the Rulers who said that it was they who picked the Menteri Besar, which is not quite what it should be.

Tuanku: I think there is a lack of rapport and, perhaps, understanding, between the ruling party and the Rulers. I think there should be frequent consultations; the Rulers should be briefed first. After all, we are both on the same side. My advice is government by consultation. Although the ruling party says that they are there to represent the people as legislators, the civil servants are more important; they are the experts, the specialists; they are there to draw up policy.

Dr. Tan: But, with due respect to Your Majesty, policy is laid down by the politicians, not by the civil servants.

Tuanku: That is right, that is what I meant. Since you are not an expert, before you can

draw up the policy, you ought to consult those who are. After consultations with the civil servants, the technicians, the policy is drawn up, accepted and then implemented. Before you draw up the policy, my advice is, it is better to have consultations before hand. That is what has happened in Johore and that is what they have been doing.

Dr. Tan: Is this the policy you would want to pursue when you are in Kuala Lumpur?

Tuanku: No, that is only my advice. As they have been legislators of the country for a long time, and all the civil servants are there. I do not wish to interfere with legislation or legislative activities; it is neither my policy nor my intention to do so.

Dr. Tan: You are known to have spoken out against corruption in the state of Johore. You have also shown a concern for the poor and the underprivileged in Johore. How do you expect to continue these interests when you are in Kuala Lumpur, where you would be a constitutional monarch?

Tuanku: I am a constitutional monarch in Johore. I am in Kuala Lumpur to represent the other eight Rulers.

Dr. Tan: In Kuala Lumpur, you have a much wider stage and you can have a wide role.

Tuanku: I am entrusted by the other eight Rulers to represent them in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr. Tan: Can you continue to pursue interests that you have shown in Johore?

Tuanku: Well, it is the policy of the government, which is why it has the Anti-Corruption Agency and all that; it is not mine. Islam tells me that what is right is right and what is wrong is wrong, and speak up when the occasion demands it.

Dr. Tan: As you know, Tuanku, in this country, almost all our politicians seem to speak out loud and bold for the underprivileged, but not enough is done for them. If the Federal constitutional monarch shows an interest in the poor and the underprivileged, it would bring great hope to the people.

Tuanku: I am not a Federal constitutional monarch. I am only entrusted by the other eight Rulers to represent them.

Dr. Tan: You are elected as the Agong...

Tuanku: Yes, by the other eight Rulers to represent them. There is already the law of the

country, the Constitution, and there are all the government ministers and, I think, they ought to know about all this by now.

Dr. Tan: An an ex-legislator, I think there is a role for the Ruler of the country. If the Ruler speaks out and shows an interest in the poor and the underprivileged, it will give them great hope.

Tuanku: What you say is leadership by example. My answer, too, is we should lead by example.

Dr. Tan: Are you aware that your election to the throne of Malaysia has given great hope to the Orang Asli too? You have taken an interest in their welfare in Johore. Would you continue to take an interest in their welfare while you are King? I am told that in Johore you visit the Orang Asli.

Tuanku: Yes. I have been accorded their highest honour as they refer to me as FATHER; and that is an honour because of the trust they have in me to speak for them.

Dr. Tan: I am one of the few ex-politicians who show an interest in the Orang Asli, and I am the only one who has persuaded a Minister to visit the Orang Asli. It was the first

time they had visible evidence of the interest of the government in their welfare.

Tuanku: Let me remind you, they are not "Orang Asli". They should be referred to as "Bumiputra Asli".

Dr. Tan: To me, they are "Bumiputra Tulin".

Tuanku: Bumiputra Asli, that is how I refer to them. I do not call them Malays because they do not practice the Islamic religion.

Dr. Tan: Some of them do.

Tuanku: Then they are Malays. The moment they practice the Islamic religion, they are Malays just like me. I have one serving in my Army.

Dr. Tan: But they have not made much progress since Merdeka and they do need somebody who takes a genuine interest in their welfare.

Tuanku: This is the fault of the Malays. They look down on them and it is they who call them "Orang Asli". I don't; I call them "Bumiputra Asli". They have more Malay blood in them than I have.

Dr. Tan: As I said before, I call them Bumiputra Tulin in the articles I have written.

Tuanku: I agree with you one hundred per cent on that. I have always referred to them as Bumiputra Asli. Well, in Johore, it is easier to help them. In Johore, the Bumiputra Asli have their settlements, their villages, on the fringe of the Malay villages; so, they do not live deep in the jungle. Their exposure, therefore, is different from those in Perak and, even Pahang, where they live deep in the jungle.

Dr. Tan: They have been moved closer to civilisation now.

Tuanku: In Johore, they have never stayed far from the village. They have always been in contact with the villagers. For the reason, their children go to school. That is the difference between the Bumiputra Asli in Johore and those elsewhere. Ours do not live deep in the jungle, and are all within range, within a few miles from the village. They are not as far out deep in the jungle, as in Pahang or in Perak. The point, though, is that the attitude of the Malays towards them has to change.

Dr. Tan: I would say that the government is responsible. I have charged the government with neglecting them, in my articles, because while the government, admittedly, has done a

tremendous lot to improve the living standards of the Malays, it has not done much for the Orang Asli.

Tuanku: We have a Director of the Jabatan Orang Asli (JOA), Dr Baharom Azhar bin Raffie's, a Kelantan man who is a very dedicated man. Unfortunately, he has to work closely with junior officers who are not dedicated enough. They have to be tuned properly, with a sense of dedication to the job.

Dr. Tan: I would say that the JOA must set up a mission of working itself out of existence because if they do their work well, and the living standards of the Orang Asli are raised, then there would be no need for the JOA.

Tuanku: That, to me, should be the way. My belief, I have been telling them, is that they ought to be integrated into the FELDA Land Schemes. Their children should go to school. I have been telling them to go to their own school, and to the other — religious, primary and secondary schools. After going through the education system, their exposure to things outside their environment, and their exposure to other Malay children, they would automatically become Muslims. At night, we can have adult education classes after work in

the land development schemes. And they may change their attitudes, their way of life. You cannot make them change unless you look after their welfare first. I can give my opinion, my advice and whatever else they need. I will not interfere but if they need, or seek my advice, I can see them and give my advice.

Dr. Tan: They certainly would need your encouragement, Your Majesty.

Tuanku: My encouragement. The whole country has my encouragement to raise the standard of living of the people. We are not here to suppress the people but to improve the standard of living.

Dr. Tan: You have been known to be a good sportsman and a sports fan. So was the previous Agong. Would you continue your interest in sports while you are in Kuala Lumpur?

Tuanku: Oh, yes. I am active in sports for my physical fitness. I am doing all the physical exercises I need. So with the previous Agong, but his sports activities are not quite the same as mine; his likings and mine are different; we are two different people.

Dr. Tan: Both of you share a common interest in polo and in football.

Tuanku: Well, I like to encourage. I do not like to see my Johore team lose. I want them to win. In my vocabulary, there is no such word as "lose", only "win".

Dr. Tan: Fortunately, Your Majesty, Johore just made it to the quarter finals in the Malaysia Cup this year.

Tuanku: We need a victory. To build up a good team, we must cast a wide net. We must start from the grassroots level, from the villages, from the schools. We need more support, physical education teachers, doctors, nutritionists and dieticians who can explain the importance of a proper diet, what amount of calories that need to be taken, what is protein, what is high cholestrol, and so on.

Dr. Tan: I should say that since Johore is such a rich state, you should not find any difficulty in getting funds for sports.

Tuanku: Oh, Yes. Don't forget we are a very rich state, as far as natural resources go. We are the biggest state in the whole of Malaysia, and we are also supporting other states with our excise revenue. If all the excise revenue from Johore remained in Johore, we would be the richest state in Malaysia.

Dr. Tan: If every other state took that attitude...

Tuanku: ... then, we would never be able to develop the whole country. That is why, when you say rich state, I add that we are also supporting the others.

Dr. Tan: But Johore was a rich state before you joined Malaya?

Tuanku: We have the revenue; we have been spending a lot on development. But we are now on a deficit.

Dr. Tan: Deficit budgeting is bad practice anywhere.

Tuanku: Sometimes, it is necessary for the government to indulge in deficit budgeting, especially if it is for development.

Dr. Tan: Are you aware that there are some in this country who view your ascension to the throne of Malaysia with misgivings? How do you intend to set these misgivings at rest?

Tuanku: They should ask the people of Johore, if they would want to know.

Dr. Tan: I have spoken to one, a son of Johore, before I came here, because I have known him a long time, and he told me that

Johore had always been fortunate in that its Rulers have mixed well with the people.

Tuanku: You want me to explain how we are always close! My great-great-great grandfather, Temenggong Abdul Rahman and then Temenggong Daing Ibrahim, and then Sultan Abu Bakar, opened up Johore. Temenggong Daing Ibrahim opened up Johore in 1855. He brought in all the workers, even the Chinese, to plant rubber, gambir, pepper and all that, and even gave land to Malays to open up districts. This was continued by my great grandfather, Sultan Abu Bakar. We opened up Johore, and developed it together with the people.

So Johore and the people, the subjects and their Ruler, the people of Johore are always together as one. There is no middleman between the ruler and the rakyat. My late grandfather, Sultan Ibrahim, often reminded me that as the Sultan of Johore, he was the servant of Johore; he did all the dirty work for their benefit. All the work he did was to ensure that his Johore subjects would reap the harvest. As Sultan, you serve the people of Johore. Any job you do is for their benefit.

Dr. Tan: Johore has been in the forefront of

the Malaysian states in wielding together people of various races — Malays, Chinese, Indians, Javanese, Banjarees. What role do you expect to play in wielding together a united Malaysian nation?

Tuanku: Bugis, too. You have left out my Bugis. We are united in Johore.

Dr. Tan: I am talking about the Malaysian nation, not Johore.

Tuanku: You said Johore. I have to tell you about my Johore, or you want me to be ...

Dr. Tan: When you are King, what role do you expect to play?

Tuanku: I shall do whatever the Prime Minister advises me to. I shall listen and see what that brings. For "Concord is Blessing"; that is the Johore motto. It means to bring to Malaysia harmony as a nation, serving under one flag, that of Malaysia. So everybody has the right to live and to earn a living in this country. You must never deprive anybody; all must be safe and protected.

Dr. Tan: I have just attended a one-day seminar on "Religion as a unifying force in a nation", in Kuala Lumpur, and the consensus of opinion is that the non-Muslims in this

country are a little concerned with the erosion of their religious freedom.

Tuanku: Oh, No. That is against the teaching of Islam, which is in the Quran. You must never look down on any other religion, any human being. They all have the right to live. They are all children of God and you should never look down, or criticize, other religions or customs, but respect them. That is also stated in the Quran.

Dr. Tan: In this instance, if I may point out to you, Tuanku, the non-Muslim religionists have difficulty in getting places of worship.

Tuanku: Well, not in Johore. We are fair. We opened Johore. We have all the other ethnic groups, and we have all the other religions. Their loyalty remains with the Rulers, and they have the right to practice their religion. It is our duty to ensure that they have a place of worship, not in unreasonable places, not along the roadside. We do not agree to that. Just find a nice place and we will allow it.

Dr. Tan: Tuanku, the Sultan of Selangor recently stated he was surprised to find that in Shah Alam, his state capital, there were mosques but no churches or temples, and he wondered why!

Tuanku: That is, you see, the way I look at it in Johore. There is the Catholic community, the Protestants, and all that. Their duty is to see that their fellows have proper places of worship, a place to practice their religion. The official religion of the country is Islam. In Johore it is written into the constitution, but anyone is free to practice his religion. I remind them, the Catholics, bishops, the ministers, that they must first make sure that their congregations and parishioners have a place of worship. They must have a place of worship, but the aim should also be to make them good Christians as well.

Dr. Tan: But, Tuanku, in this country, increasingly, it is becoming more and more difficult to get land to build a church or temple. The non-Muslim religionists are concerned about this.

Tuanku: In any housing estate, or land development scheme, there should be land provided by the developer for a place of worship — mosque, church, temple whatever they want, and they should have a place there.

Dr. Tan: I can tell you there is none. Worse still, if a house is used as a place of worship, the local authority makes some difficulty and

says: "Look here, this is a residence, not a place of worship."

Tuanku: That is right. Therefore, the developer and the town planner should make sure that they plan where the places of worship ought to be in the housing estates they build, to cater for the Christians, the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists. The developer should provide, and reserve, land for places of worship.

Dr. Tan: I agree with you entirely, Tuanku, and that is right.

Tuanku: If you start turning a house into a place of worship, the neighbours might object.

Dr. Tan: I agree with you. But you see, the other religionists are forced to do so because they want to buy a piece of land and they cannot get a piece of land. They had, often, been given a piece of land right from the start but their land is taken away later. What are they to do if they are forced to give up their land?

Tuanku: I am not well versed in events outside Johore.

Dr. Tan: I don't know whether Your Majesty has read the statement made by the Sultan of Selangor about two or three months ago.

Tuanku: That is his state. I do not interfere.

Dr. Tan: Yes, in his state, but it has given encouragement to other religionists in this country.

Tuanku: They must be allowed to practice their religion, whatever it is they belong to, Catholic or Church of England, Methodist or the Seventh Day Adventist, or even Hindus or Buddhists. They must practice their religion because religion teaches you discipline.

Dr. Tan: I agree with you, Tuanku.

Tuanku: I only see them as good Christians or as bad Christians because a bad Christian, a bad Buddhist or a bad Hindu would not be an asset to this country. He would be a bad citizen. He would be like a drug addict. Like bad Muslims who become communists, they might go into the jungle if they had no places of worship.

Dr. Tan: That is right. I agree, Tuanku.

Tuanku: In Johore, we are different. My great-great-grandfather gave land for churches, and for convent schools, all over the state. I do not understand what some people from other states have said about other parts of Malaysia because Johore is never like that.

Dr. Tan: So I am told. That is why if this is published, it would have a tremendous impact on the people.

Tuanku: But the thing they forget, whether bad or good, it is still publicity. Now I am known, well-known, famous throughout the world. The Sultan of Johore is more well-known than anyone else because of all the publicity.

Dr. Tan: Now my purpose in coming for this interview is not to seek publicity, for you or for me. At the recent investiture ceremony of your birthday, you spoke out against racial and religious discrimination. Would you continue to play such a role when you are in Kuala Lumpur?

Tunku: I have already spoken to you earlier that we do not discriminate against other religions. We respect other ethnic groups, other races, their customs, their religions. It is a sin to look down on them. Islam does not ask us to show disrespect or to harm any other religion. We only go to war if somebody wants to topple our religion, not because you want to finish the other religion.

Dr. Tan: I do not know whether you can remember this. I think it was seven years ago, when Datuk Asri Muda, was Minister of Land

and Regional Development. He said that Christianity was worse than communism.

Tuanku: Those are his views. I reserve my judgement. I do not share his views. I mean, to me, whatever religion a man practices, the teaching of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, he will be a good citizen. A bad Christian, Buddhist or a bad Hindu or Muslim who does not practice his religion becomes a liability to the nation.

Dr. Tan: Or if he has no place to worship, he becomes an atheist.

Tuanku: Atheist, but heathen also.

Dr. Tan: The Sultans of Johore were well known for being fiercely independent. Do you anticipate any difficulty with the Central Government? In a constitutional monarchy, the King reigns but the elected government Rules.

Tuanku: I am not the King. I am the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. And just as I am addressed as "Your Majesty", so should the other eight Rulers. We treat our Rulers slightly lower, as "Your Highnesses". But they are all constitutional monarchs, like the Kings and Queens of England, and they should also be addressed as

“Your Majesties,” not as “Your Highnesses.” The Sultan of Selangor, for instance, ought to be addressed as “His Majesty, The Sultan of Selangor.” The style in the Islamic way, or Turkish way, then is His Majesty, The Sultan of Selangor. Or in Arabic, the Malik of Selangor, the Malik of Saudi Arabic, the Malik of Jordan. But the Jordan and Saudi Arabian Rulers are known as Kings and addressed as “Your Majesties.” I do not see why the eight Rulers are known as His Highnesses and I as His Majesty. No, we are all of the same rank, and should be addressed as His Majesties.

Dr. Tan: But there are differences, although I am not a lawyer. The Agong is the paramount ruler. He is ...

Tuanku: He is the paramount King, the Supreme King, because the others are also King and why should I look down, why should they look up to me? We are all the same. I told them all, when they asked me to accept their offer (to make me King). I said, Sir, one thing: our actions and efforts are based on collective decision and collective effort. You ask me to represent you. I am beholden to all of you, your wishes I obey, I accept. If I am King, you are also King; if I am to be His Majesty, you are also His Majesty. The differences came about

in the first place because of the British colonial attitude to belittle us. Duli Yang Maha Mulia Baginda Sultan Johore is how I am officially addressed in Malay, and this means, His Majesty the Sultan of Johore. Why should I lower my status to His Highness, when I am addressed in English? I do not like to belittle people, least of all the other Rulers. I do not like that. I respect them all. It never entered my mind to dream of being an Agong. I spoke to all the other Rulers that they should consider the Sultan of Perak.

Dr. Tan: But the Sultan of Perak, at that time, was not even crowned as Sultan.

Tuanku: There is no such thing as being crowned; the only state that has a crown is Johore!

Dr. Tan: I was told that ...

Tuanku: No, the Sultan, the late Sultan of Perak, because he was more senior, he should be next in line, rather than me. It never entered my mind then to be an Agong.

Dr. Tan: This Terpuulanglah kepada Tuhan

Tuanku: Yes, when a Ruler wishes me to command, I obey him. I told the eight Rulers that I am loyal towards them, but also told them that I represented the eight of you. I told them,

your trust in me is the biggest headache I have; the responsibility, the trust entrusted in me to represent them, so I can never let them down.

Dr. Tan: Coming to the crux of my question then, Tuanku, as Agong, do you expect any difficulty in your relationship with the Central Government?

Tuanku: It is not my policy to interfere.

Dr. Tan: Do you subscribe to what I mentioned earlier: the Agong reigns but the elected Government Rules?

Tuanku: They are the legislators, they are elected by the people to represent the will of the people. I only appoint them, the Central Government in power, the party in power when they need to be appointed as legislators. They legislate in accordance with the Constitution, in accordance with the laws of the country, so far as they do not get off that.

Dr. Tan: Well, as you know, as long as the constitutional monarch knows that he reigns but does not rule, and that the will of the Parliament must be supreme, I myself do not see any difficulty as I have already stated in one of the articles I wrote recently. I have stated that if, for any reason, there should by

any doubt in the mind of the Agong to be, he could always consult his Timbalan, who was until recently the Lord President.

Tuanku: You all know the constitution. I cannot seek his advice. He is the Sultan of Perak. I can seek the advice of all my brother Rulers plus the Attorney General, who is officially the Adviser on legal matters. Once you become Sultan, you cannot become a policy Adviser. This is not in accordance with the constitution.

Dr. Tan: I know. What I meant to ask was that you need not do that officially. You could do it unofficially; it is available to you.

Tuanku: Experience. He is qualified on legal matters but he was not groomed to be Ruler to lead the people. He may have reached the top of his judicial career, but he had not been groomed from small, because Perak has four houses, unlike in Johore. As a son of the Sultan you should be groomed.

Dr. Tan: I think, in Perak there are six steps before a contender becomes Sultan.

Tuanku: From the four Houses, actually. None of them really knows.

Dr. Tan: In this case, it was the will of God. He was not even Raja di Hilir, the second in

line, when the Raja Muda passed away in London. He was not also in line for the Raja Muda until the Dewan Negeri decided that the Raja di Hilir was not fit enough physically to take on the onerous duties. So Raja Tun Azlan Shah, as he was then known, was made the Raja Muda. And then it so happened that a few days before your election, his predecessor passed away.

Tuanku: The election of the Agong is in accordance with the constitution. The senior name, the one on top of the line, is given a chance, unless he turns it down, or we allow that he should not be a Ruler. There are only nine of us. So why not give Perak a turn if he has not had the opportunity; he had turned it down once. I persuaded him, please do not turn in down this time, please accept. All of us agreed that he should be Agong. As I was the last one on the seniority list, I never expected to be Agong after the Sultan of Perak passed away. I never even sent in the customary letter of acceptance. I said no, until all eight brother Rulers offered it to me individually. It was only then that I accepted their wishes.

PREVIOUS KINGS OF MALAYSIA

The FIRST YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

3rd August 1957 — 1st April 1960: Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Muhammad, DDN: SMN. He was the Yang Di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan before he was elected Yang Di-Pertuan Agong.

The SECOND YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

14th April 1960 — 1st September 1960: Tuanku Hisamuddin Alam Shah Al-Haj ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Alaidin Sulaiman Shah, DMN: DK (Brunei). He was the Sultan of Selangor before he was elected Yang Di-Pertuan Agong.

The THIRD YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

21st September 1960 — 20th September 1965: Tuanku Syed Putra Al-Haj ibni Al-Marhum Syed Hassan Jamalullail, DK: DKM: DMN: SMJ: SPMP: DK (Selangor); DK (Kelantan); DK (Brunei); DK (Pahang); DP (Sarawak); DK (Kedah); SPDK (Sabah). He is now the Raja of Perlis.

The FOURTH YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

21st September 1965 — 20th September 1970: Tuanku Ismail Nasiruddin Shah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Zainal Abidin, DKK (Perak); DK (Pahang); DKM: DMN: SPMT: DK (Kelantan); DK (Selangor). He was the Sultan of Terengganu.

The FIFTH YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

21st September 1970 — 20th September 1975: Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Badlishah, DK, DKH, DKM, DMN, DUK, DK (Kelantan); DK (Pahang); DK (Selangor); DP (Sarawak); DK (Perlis); SPMK, SSDK, DKNS. He is now the Sultan of Kedah.

The SIXTH YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

21st September 1975 — 30th March 1979: Tuanku Yahya Petra ibni Al-Marhum

Sultan Ibrahim, DKM: SMN: PKC (Pahang); DK (Perlis); DK (Sarawak); DK: DMN: SPMK: SJMK: SPSK; DK (Terengganu); DK (Selangor); DK (Kedah); DK (Brunei); SMN: DKM: SMN: DK (Pahang). He was the Sultan of Kelantan.

The SEVENTH YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

26th April 1979 — 25th April 1984: DYMM Seri Paduka Baginda Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Al-Musta'in Billah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Abu Bakar Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mu'adzam Shah, DKM: DKP: DK: SSAP: SIMP: DMN: DK (Perak); DK (Johore); DK (Kelantan); DK (Terengganu); DK (Perlis); DK (Kedah); SPCM; SPMJ: DK (Brunei).

A SHORT NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

by

Raj Vasil

Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon has had a very distinguished political career. He was a Member of Parliament from 1964 to 1978. For years, he was widely viewed and acclaimed as Mr Opposition. Even though he was always associated with the parties in opposition, his integrity, honesty and commitment to Malaysia were never questioned, even by his political adversaries on the Government side. It was no surprise then that in June 1980 the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong conferred on him the title of Tan Sri. Tan Sri Dr Tan is able to interview

the leaders of the Government and discuss in his writings political issues, which under the law cannot be discussed in public. He does them with full freedom and a remarkable forthrightness. It is a measure of the confidence responded in him by all Malaysians.

Tan Sri Dr. Tan completed his medical education in Singapore in 1949. Even at medical school, he was active in student affairs; he held the positions of President, Vice-President and Treasurer of the students union. For two years he worked at the General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur. In May 1952, he began private practice at 329 Batu Road (now Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman). While practicing medicine, in view of his developed social conscience, Tan Sri Dr Tan took full interest in community affairs. His greatest love was education and he served on the managing committees of several institutions. For many years, he was closely associated with the University of Malaya as a member of its council and later as its chairman. He has personally helped many a student who did not have the financial means to carry on with schooling or higher education.

In the early 1950s, with the beginning of politics in Malaya, he joined the newly-formed Kuala Lumpur Labour Party through two

school mates, Tan Tuan Boon and Lee Moke Seng. The Kuala Lumpur branch of the Labour Party occupied a special place in the sense that it was almost entirely an organisation of middle-class professionals and intellectuals, who did not participate in grassroots politics but were happy to get together regularly to discuss and debate. In the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections, two years before independence, Tan Sri Dr Tan worked for the Labour Party in its election campaign in Kuala Lumpur. Despite the fact that the party had failed badly, Tan Sri Dr Tan continued his association with the organisation in view of his commitment to democratic socialism. In fact, after independence in 1957, he began to take a more active and direct part in the party's activities. In 1959, he acted as the chairman of the Socialist Front (including the Labour Party and the Party Rakyat) Election Committee in Selangor. The party won a large number of seats in the Parliament as well as in several state legislatures. The electoral successes allowed the party to establish itself as the chief opposition in the country.

It was only in 1964, at the height of the Indonesian confrontation of Malaysia, when the Labour Party was badly split between the Chinese-educated extremists and the English-

educated moderates, that Tan Sri Dr Tan agreed to contest for the parliamentary seat of Batu in Kuala Lumpur and the Selangor State Assembly seat of Kepong. Even though the Labour Party, along with all other Opposition parties, suffered crushing defeats at the hands of the Alliance, Tan Sri Dr Tan won both seats (The Labour Party had won only two parliamentary seats). His electoral success was entirely a result of his own personal appeal among the common masses, including some Malays, based on their confidence in his integrity, honesty and loyalty to Malaysia. In Parliament, soon Tan Sri Dr Tan established himself as an outstanding parliamentarian, questioning and probing the Government's action and activities with a thoroughness unknown before. He was so much in the news through these that soon he came to be popularly known all over the country as Mr Opposition, in Parliament he very much seemed to be a one-man opposition.

However, within his own party, the Labour Party, an intense struggle was being waged by the Chinese-educated extremists to assume full control. In the end, the Chinese-educated took over the party as they had grassroots support. Tan Sri Dr Tan was the last of the senior leaders to leave the party as a result of pressure

from the radicals and extremists.

During the period in Parliament and the Labour Party, Tan Sri Dr Tan, in keeping with his deep commitment to multi-racial politics, made very deliberate efforts to establish close contacts with the indigenous Malays. He not only sought to represent the views, frustrations and aspirations of the bumiputra but also worked hard, against substantial lack of interest, sometimes even opposition, to attracting them to the Labour Party in order to strengthen its multi-racial character.

Later, after leaving the Labour Party, with Professor Syed Hussein Al Atas and Dr Lim Chong Eu, Tan Sri Dr Tan founded a genuinely multi-racial party, Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, whose one key objective was to attract Malays away from communal politics. However, unfortunately, the experiment did not work and Tan Sri Dr Tan was forced to form yet another non-communal political organisation, the Social Justice Party. These were undoubtedly difficult times to promote non-communal politics and organisations in view of the racial polarisation that had occurred among both the Malays and non-Malays following the tragic racial explosion of May 1969. Despite frustrations and disappoint-

ments, Tan Sri Dr Tan continued, often a lone struggle, to reassert non-communal politics and values and representative democracy. In 1976, a serious health problem forced him to withdraw from active politics. After recovery, since 1980, Tan Sri Dr Tan has maintained his efforts to preserve democracy and multi-racialism in Malaysia through his writings.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Bumiputras — (literally — “sons of the soil”) Malays and other indigenous people
- Bumiputra Asli/
Bumiputra Tulin — The Original or Genuine Bumiputra
- Jabatan Orang Asli (JOA) — Department of Orang Asli
- Dewan Negri — The Council that decides on Malay customs and succession to the throne of Perak
- Kampungs — Villages
- Menteri Besar — Chief Minister
- Merdeka — Independence
- Orang Asli — Aboriginal people
- PAS — Partai Islam Se Malaysia

Raja Di-Hilir	—	Third in line of the succession to the throne of Perak
Raja Muda	—	Second in line of the succession to the throne of Perak and generally of other states as well
Rakyat/Rakyat Jelata	—	The common people
Sultan	—	Ruler
“Terpulanglah kepada Tuhan”	—	The Will of God
Timbalan Yang Di-Pertuan Agong	—	Deputy King
UMNO	—	United Malays National Organisation
Yang Di-Pertuan Agong	—	Malaysian King

