

The royal touch made the difference

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Article

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AT least twice a year during their reign, the king and queen of Malaysia would light up the Universiti Sains Malaysia campus with not only their regal presence but also their charm.

And the royal couple have endeared themselves to both the Malaysian and foreign students and teaching staff of the university.

"I have been in this country for two years and I have met your king and queen two times, and shaken hands with the king once."

"We come from a far away country where we only see the pictures of our queen in newspapers and magazines; but in Malaysia, I have exchanged words with your queen!"

These were among the comments by foreign students.

These comments, in a nutshell, was how the USM international community summed up their experiences with the royal couple during their time with the university.



The queen as USM Chancellor takes a keen interest in all functions organised by the university including this aerospace engineering exhibition held in August.

The unique USM association with the royal family started when Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, who was then the chancellor of USM, became Malaysia's 12th king on Dec 12, 2001 for a five-year term.

Even though his chancellorship was abruptly interrupted, he left a decisive impact on the university as someone who cared dearly; someone so involved in knowledge and with a special liking for research.

Though USM lost its chancellor to another university as result of some constitutional arrangement, all was not lost.

USM was most fortunate to have a queen as chancellor instead.

The queen was officially proclaimed as the third chancellor in early 2002 at an investiture held at the Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra, named after its first chancellor, the late father of the king.

This is part of USM's continuing tradition of being closely associated with the Perlis royal family since its inception in 1969.

In the last five years, USM has basked under the grace of the queen as the new chancellor.

It was also a significant period for the university as it embarked on a journey towards a global mission.

The period, beginning with the patronage and guidance of the king, and then followed through by the queen, coincided with the Eighth Malaysia Plan during which time USM transformed itself.

At a glance, the outcome of the USM scorecard for 2001-2005 encompassed many proud moments, and several firsts as the university carved its character and tradition.

Noticeably, USM gradually evolved from a largely teaching university to one that is research-intensive.

As the graduate students' enrolment increased multi-fold to more than 6,500 in 2005, and with half that number doing research, and more than 21 per cent pursuing doctoral degrees, the shift is discernible.

Again, the number of international students, spanning in excess of 60 nationalities, grew to make up more than 15 per cent of the graduate population, and counting.

This is almost halfway to achieving the 30 per cent target set for 2010.

All these set the tone for the making of the USM of the 21st century.

And it shows good promise because USM is being aided by a new milieu of enhanced creative ideas, new research skills and talent in advancing a nascent knowledge-based community of learners.

Hence, it augurs well that the government has announced USM as a research university under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

In short, the task ahead is to bring R&D to the next level, making it the hallmark of USM activities, identifiable with the university's motto, *Kami Memimpin* (We Lead).

This would not have been possible without the grace of the country's king and queen.

So, in the next two days, as the royal couple depart from the capital city for the last time in their official capacity for their home in Kangar, it will be met with both delight and apprehension on the part of the USM citizens.

There will be apprehension because the queen will not preside over the university any more; but delight because USM will continue to receive attention from the royal couple, even more so, as they move closer to the campus.

Rest assured the campus population looks forward to interacting and engaging with the royal couple in taking the university forward, benefiting from their wisdom and inspiration.

As for now however, it's time to bid farewell and we wish to say *Setinggi-tinggi menjunjung kasih* for the memorable years during their reign as the king and queen of this nation, of which USM is privileged to be part of.

It indeed has been a rare experience for USM as Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail, the third Yang di-Pertuan Agong (1960-1965) was appointed as the founder chancellor of USM in 1971.

Like the university, the nation at large has undoubtedly taken the royal couple to their hearts, and there will be no shortage of fond memories to be relived and cherished many times over.

The recent launching of the book, *The King, The Man*, speaks volumes of how the nation will miss the reign of the 12th king and queen of Malaysia.

Mengadap Seri Paduka Baginda Tuanku berdua, semoga Allah merahmati pemerintahan dan melanjutkan usia Seri Paduka Baginda Tuanku berdua. Dirgahayu Tuanku, Daulat Tuanku. Patik sekalian Menjunjung Setinggi-tinggi Kasih.

(And to the royal couple, may God bless your reign. Long live your Majesties. A big thank you from your humble subjects.)

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