

Star Special

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WELCOMING THE REIGN



Dawn of a new era

A warm welcome to Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar as His Majesty ascends the throne as the 17th Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia.



Sultan Ibrahim with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at Istana Singapore during His Majesty's official visit in October 2023. With them are Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah and Lee's wife Ho Ching. — Photo by the Royal Press Office



Sultan Ibrahim with Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah during His Majesty's visit to Brunei Darussalam in late 2023. — Photo by the Royal Press Office

(Below) The Ruler with his grandchildren at a shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur. — Photo by the Royal Press Office

Sultan Ibrahim was awarded an honorary PhD in mechanical engineering technology by Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia in December 2023. With him is Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah. — Photo by the Royal Press Office



Ruling with wisdom and compassion

By NELSON BENJAMIN
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JOHOR Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar has been known to be one of the few leaders who never shies away from speaking his mind, especially when it comes to the welfare of his subjects.

Since ascending the throne in 2010, Sultan Ibrahim has had no qualms about voicing his opinions or displeasure on various issues, including reprimanding politicians who sow distrust and disunity among the people.

In 2017, the Johor Sultan ordered a controversial laundrette in Muar to immediately stop its discriminatory practice of only allowing Muslims to use its facilities, or risk being shut down by the Ruler himself.

The Johor Ruler has also slammed a former Cabinet minister for giving a ceramah at a mosque, stressing political elements were barred at all mosques in the state.

Last year, following allegations that only Muslim students from an all-girls school were invited to an SPM workshop held in a hotel in Johor Baru, Sultan Ibrahim decreed no one should be left out of any public programme because of their race or religion.

The Ruler has also been using Facebook, which currently has over 1.1 million followers on its official page, to post his thoughts and comments.

Social media has also been Sultan Ibrahim's preferred communication platform on several occasions to express displeasure over cleanliness and environmental matters – issues close to His Majesty's heart.

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Sultan Ibrahim appealed to his subjects to keep calm and adhere to advice and follow the standard operating procedure set by the Health Ministry.

Sultan Ibrahim called upon the people to band together to curb the spread of the virus and stop the spread of fake news. Sultan Ibrahim also directed teachers to get vaccinated so they do not spread the virus to their students.

The Ruler is also a firm believer in Bangsa Johor, a concept aimed at promoting greater unity among people in the state.

Sultan Ibrahim places emphasis on racial unity and wants representation from Malay, Chinese and Indian NGOs in the committee to provide feedback and input on the annual Kembara Mahkota Johor expedition.



Sultan Ibrahim waving to the crowd during the Johor Chingay procession in Johor Baru held on Feb 11, 2023. — Photo by the Royal Press Office

Despite His Majesty's sternness, Sultan Ibrahim is also known as a compassionate Ruler who is well loved and respected by his subjects.

Those who have met Sultan Ibrahim describe His Majesty as a warm-hearted Ruler with an amiable personality and a good sense of humour.

The Ruler's soft, gentle side is most evident when His Majesty becomes teary-eyed listening to their stories of pain and suffering.

On Oct 25, 2016, when a fire broke out at the Sultanah Aminah Hospital, killing six patients, the Ruler again

demonstrated great love by directing the hospital administration to use the Royal ward to temporarily house displaced patients affected by the fire.

Three years later in 2019, during the Sungai Kim Kim chemical pollution issue in Pasir Gudang, the Johor royal family made at least three visits to meet with victims at Hospital Sultan Ismail and Pasir Gudang Indoor Stadium, which housed the medical units.

Last year, Sultan Ibrahim also cut short a private trip to Turkiye and the Middle East when news about the devastating floods in Johor broke out,

returning to Johor earlier than scheduled to personally visit those affected.

Even when Sultan Ibrahim was still abroad, the Ruler was in constant contact with the state government and directed his Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation to provide aid since the beginning of the floods.

Over the years, the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation has provided more than RM170mil in aid to the people, including 103,000 tents in anticipation of floods in Johor and the other states.



DAULAT TUANKU

SALUTATIONS & HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS TO



**HIS MAJESTY SULTAN IBRAHIM,
KING OF MALAYSIA**

&

**HER MAJESTY RAJA ZARITH SOFIAH,
QUEEN OF MALAYSIA**

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GREEN INDUSTRIES



A Ruler who always prioritises the people

> FROM PAGE 2

Sultan Ibrahim and Johor Permaisuri Raja Zarith Sofiah Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah have always paid close attention to the people's welfare and provided assistance to countless Johoreans who faced hardships during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Now, Sultan Ibrahim will be taking on a new role as the country's 17th king beginning Jan 31, for the next five years.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi said that Malaysians will be blessed to have Sultan Ibrahim as their next king as he always prioritises the people.

"Tuanku is a person who goes down to the ground. During the Covid-19 pandemic the royal family gave out a lot of aid over two years," he said, adding that every time there was a flood, Sultan Ibrahim's foundations were the first on the ground distributing aid.

He also described His Majesty as a very knowledgeable person especially on the history of Johor.

"A lot of historical events were shared during my sessions hitching a ride with Tuanku in his car during his visits to the districts.

"Tuanku is very knowledgeable on security matters and it is something I enjoy listening to.

"Tuanku also knows a lot about boats, planes, cars and trains. Tuanku can pilot all those vehicles and even a helicopter," he said, describing talking to Sultan Ibrahim as motivating and inspiring.

For Johor council of royal court president Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Ramli who has served under the reign of three Johor Sultans, of which two have become kings, all of them may be of different personalities, but the one common thing is their caring attitude and the determination to ensure Johor progresses in all aspects.

"They do not want anyone to be marginalised. They always put the people first," he said, adding that he was confident that Sultan Ibrahim would project the same image because the Johor Sultanate has always been tolerant and caring for the people.

He added, that is how *raja dan rakyat berpisah tiada* (ruler and people cannot be separated) was coined.

He added that His Majesty was a determined man and will surely have a lot of plans for the development of not just the state but also the country.

"His Majesty wants people to have progressive ideas. He wants the people to have discipline, have high integrity, help each other, and cooperate with each other.

"His Majesty wants to make sure this place is a better place to live in," he said, adding that it was inborn in the Ruler to look after the welfare of each citizen.

Sultan Ibrahim, who comes from a line of strong-willed, savvy and independent Rulers, is passionate about developing Johor into a modern and progressive state.

The Sultan's vision is to transform the state into Malaysia's next economic powerhouse after the Klang Valley.

Sultan Ibrahim was crowned



Johor Crown Prince Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim (second from left) surprising Sultan Ibrahim with the Piala Malaysia trophy that was won by Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) football club, while His Majesty was having tea at a shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur in December 2023. — Photo by the Royal Press Office

the fifth Ruler of modern Johor in March 2015, marking a historical moment as the last coronation in the state was held for his late grandfather, Almarhum Sultan Ismail Ibni Almarhum Sultan Sultan Ibrahim, in February 1960.

A savvy investor with investments in an array of businesses both local and foreign, the Ruler is also an avid traveller just like his ancestors, who embarked on various voyages.

The Sultan regularly brings along top Johor state officials and heads of government-linked companies during these business and trade trips abroad to help bring more investments into the state.

One of his passions is collecting old and new cars and motorcycles, which are all parked in garages within the palace grounds.

Sultan Ibrahim is also proud of his latest palace in Mersing, better known as Istana Flintstones.

This palace, located on a 24ha site overlooking the sea with a nine-storey lighthouse, is now a tourist attraction in Mersing town, which is a town known for its tourism and island-hopping packages.

The Flintstones was an American animated series framed against a romanticised Stone Age backdrop and was hugely popular during its run from the early to mid-1960s.

In 1994, it was also made into a movie featuring big-name actors like John Goodman, Rick Moranis, Halle Berry and even Elizabeth Taylor.

On Sultan Ibrahim's interaction with his subjects, the Ruler is clearly happy with the Kembara Mahkota Johor pro-



Sultan Ibrahim being welcomed by devotees at the state-level Thaipusam celebration at the Arulmigu Sri Balasubramaniar Temple in Skudai, Johor Baru on Feb 5, 2023. — Photo by the Royal Press Office

gramme, which started in 2001.

However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme has not been held since 2020.

The expedition on vehicles, led by the Ruler, is aimed at forging closer ties between Johor's royal family and the people through various programmes carried out at each stopover along the journey.

Sultan Ibrahim's passion for sports is also well known. In his youth, the Sultan played a mean game of polo not just locally, but also in tournaments held in Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines.

His Majesty earned the distinction of being the best polo player in Asia during the polo world qualifications in the 1990s.

Besides that, Sultan Ibrahim also enjoys parasailing, boating (jet ski), parachuting, shooting and driving sports cars. The Ruler once emerged champion in a falling plate shooting event organised by the army at the Malaysian Army Combat Training Centre (Pulada) in Johor.

Sultan Ibrahim, who is the third of 10 children and the eldest son, was born at Sultanah Aminah Hospital in Johor Baru on Nov 22, 1958. His Majesty received his formal education at Sekolah Temenggong Abdul Rahman (1) before leaving for Trinity Grammar School in Australia.

Later on, the Ruler travelled to the United States to pursue his

studies in law and diplomacy.

Sultan Ibrahim obtained his religious education from Sekolah Agama Air Molek in Johor Baru.

After completing his secondary education, Sultan Ibrahim underwent basic military training at Pusat Latihan Darat in Kota Tinggi, Johor, for three months.

The Ruler also received military training in the United States at Fort Benning, Georgia, and later, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Tuanku was appointed deputy commander of the Johor Military Force upon completing his military training overseas.

Tuanku has trained and served in the Air Force and Navy, and is a qualified green beret commando in Malaysia and the United States.

Sultan Ibrahim is also a member of the Red Beret Kompassus of Indonesia and a fully qualified divemaster.

As part of his training for kingship, Sultan Ibrahim joined the Johor Civil Service and served in various departments, including the district office and the land, health and treasury departments.

In 1981, Sultan Ibrahim was proclaimed the Tunku Mahkota of Johor. Sultan Ibrahim is married to Raja Zarith Sofiah, a Perak princess and an Oxford University graduate. She is also the Chancellor of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

The couple is blessed with six children – Tunku Ismail, Tunku Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah, Tunku Idris Iskandar Ismail Abdul Rahman, the late Tunku Abdul Jalil Iskandar Ibrahim Ismail, Tunku Abdul Rahman Hassanah Jeffri and Tunku Abu Bakar Mahmood Iskandar Ibrahim.



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Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi presenting land titles to Felda settlers in Kota Tinggi.



Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi mingling with the people at a Deepavali event in Johor.

Improving Johor's infrastructure

IT has been two years since Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi assumed office as the state's 19th Menteri Besar. The 45-year-old spoke passionately to **NELSON BENJAMIN** about an array of issues including his relationship with Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar and Crown Prince Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim who has been appointed Johor Regent, his government's achievements, and his plans for the state.

How is your relationship with the Johor Sultan these days? How often do you meet and are the meetings still on Wednesdays?

I think the relationship has strengthened and matured especially in the past two years. As we all know, becoming the Menteri Besar (in 2022) was not just a shock to the nation, but I was personally shocked and I have to admit that it was a bit challenging at the start because Johor is very special in terms of how the state is being led and administered. The royal family, namely His Majesty is very hands-on and has a deep interest in what the government does for the state and its Bangsa Johor, the people.

We have the weekly meetings where I meet Tuanku to present (updates) to him and discuss with him the papers that will be brought to the state executive councillors (Exco) meeting. What I do is nothing new. This is the hallmark of a constitutional monarchy's right, where the Menteri Besar meets him and as a young Menteri Besar, it is a privilege for me to be able to do so. That is where I learn, understand and also seek advice from His Majesty especially on policies, strategies and action plans that need to be done when it comes to serving the people of Johor.

As a result of those regular meetings, I believe our relationship has matured. I have come to understand Tuanku a lot better now and I feel that His Majesty always puts the priority of Bangsa Johor above anything else, and that's how I'm also guided in terms of coming up with policies and action plans to serve the people of Johor. Our meetings are now set every Tuesday instead of Wednesdays as His



Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi on a site visit to check on a road upgrading project between Segamat and Ayer Hitam.

Majesty felt Wednesday mornings were too rushed as I also have the weekly state Exco meetings thus he decreed that I see him on Tuesdays so that there is ample time to discuss on all matters that are related to the state.

On the meeting itself, Tuanku is a very disciplined and detailed leader. He is also very compassionate and kind at the same time. So, Tuanku has a way of making nervous people like me feel comfortable.

I'm very grateful for his act of kindness every time I have an audience with him. Tuanku is very detailed and will check every single document passed to him and Tuanku is also very careful when it comes to money. Every time I have an audience with Tuanku, he is very particular about how we spend the people's taxes. Hence, whenever I meet Tuanku, the level of preparation is quite intense as I want to make sure that I am well versed and well prepared before I brief him on any subject matter.

Did the Johor Sultan give you any special advice on what he wants for Johoreans before he becomes the Agong? What other advice has Tuanku given to you or the state executive councillors in the last two years? Anything in particular?

Well, Tuanku has very high expectations for Johor. He knows that Johor is destined for greatness and he wants to make that vision a reality. Therefore, focusing on the economy is very important for this administration because only through this focus will there be an impact in terms of improving livelihoods of the

people, more job opportunities, better salaries, things that matter to Bangsa Johor.

Tuanku often reminds me that infrastructure projects with big impact on the people need to be resolved as fast as possible. Just like flood mitigation projects, Hospital Sultanah Aminah 2, the widening of the North-South Expressway and Senai Desaru Expressway (SDE), and also, making sure the roads are well maintained.

All these are important things that Tuanku advises me to make sure it's done properly, and I sense that even if Tuanku ascends as King in KL, it is something that he will continue to focus on for Johor. I am pretty sure he will have a close eye on me and my state excos.

On whether I will see Tuanku as frequently once he is in Kuala Lumpur, I'm still unsure but even if Tuanku is there, I'm sure he will be looking after Malaysians as a whole. I am sure he will not forget us in Johor. I think that the relationship between the people of Johor and Tuanku as King will not change. There will always be a special bond. I will think that Johor is destined for more projects after this. Malaysians as a whole would be blessed by having Tuanku as their next king. Tuanku always prioritised the people and after this, he will prioritise all Malaysians as King. I believe that is what all Johoreans feel.

When it comes to Tuanku, he always goes down to the ground and during the Covid-19 pandemic, Tuanku and the Johor royal family as a whole, spent about RM180mil in distributing aid

over a period of two years. Every time there are floods, his foundations are the first to be on the ground distributing aid to the people of Johor. As a Johorean, I feel blessed that Tuanku is our Sultan and I hope Malaysians will feel the same when Tuanku becomes the Agong.

You have spent quite a considerable amount of time with the Johor Sultan, especially since your exco days and again as the Menteri Besar. Any special moments that you can remember and cherish during your interactions with Tuanku? Any unforgettable memories?

I can name two. One is every time Tuanku goes to the districts, he usually drives his own car and I usually request if I can tag along with Tuanku because I enjoy listening to his advice, stories and knowledge that he has about Johor. Tuanku is a very knowledgeable person. Tuanku's knowledge of the history of Johor is quite remarkable because of his experience as Sultan and because he was trained by the late Sultan Iskandar.

A lot of historical events are shared during those sessions when I hitch a ride with him. Tuanku is also knowledgeable in security matters. Tuanku had a military stint in the past so his knowledge on security is something I enjoy listening to.

Sultan Ibrahim also knows a lot about boats, planes, cars and trains. Tuanku can pilot all those vehicles including helicopters. So, it is very motivating and inspiring. For me, I take this as a special moment that I get to spend with Tuanku as he is less guarded and speaks his mind.

The other special moment I cherish was when I was conferred a Datukship by Tuanku. I was given that Datukship after nearly two years serving Tuanku. I think that is an experience I will cherish for the rest of my life because it is not easy to be awarded such a prestigious award, especially from Johor. I really cherish that experience.

Once the Johor Sultan begins his term as Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tunku Mahkota Johor Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim (TMJ) will be the Johor

Regent. How would you describe your relationship with TMJ? Do you meet TMJ often? What are some of the matters you hope to discuss with him?

I started having an audience with TMJ when I was first appointed a state executive councillor. At that time I regularly met Tuanku due to work as I was the exco in charge of youth, sports and tourism. Under TMJ's leadership, we were going through a tough period because of the Covid-19 pandemic and I remember vividly setting up, with his blessings, the Southern Volunteers, where we rallied almost 15,000 to 20,000 youth volunteers across all the districts in Johor to get them to help enlist the public for vaccination.

Before we started that campaign, we had low vaccination rate compared to other states. But with this drive, and with TMJ's blessings and support, we became No.1 within one month in terms of vaccination rate.

On top of that, these volunteers were working at the Vaccination Centres, helping the people through the vaccination process. Therefore, Southern Volunteers was an avenue for me to get to know TMJ better.

We also launched the Tunku Mahkota Ismail Youth Centre (TMIYC) with the first centre in Johor Baru and then we branched out to the other districts. The one in Muar should be ready by this year. Simpang Renggam Phase One is also going to be ready. The centre acts as a platform for youth engagement and to have activities that are related to the youth.

I have a good working relationship with TMJ, and I hope to build on that as Tuanku has also always reminded me to get advice and consent from TMJ when it comes to the development of Johor.

I am sure as Regent, I will be meeting him on a regular basis. I see TMJ as a person whose vision is aligned with Tuanku's when it comes to developing and serving the people of Johor. That makes it very easy for me, as Menteri Besar, to serve, because everybody is aligned when it comes to the vision and objective and goals of wanting to serve the people of Johor.



DAULAT TUANKU

MERAFAK SEMBAH UCAPAN SETINGGI-TINGGI TAHNIAH KEPADA



KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SERI PADUKA BAGINDA YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG,
SULTAN IBRAHIM IBNI ALMARHUM SULTAN ISKANDAR

&

KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SERI PADUKA BAGINDA RAJA PERMAISURI AGONG,
RAJA ZARITH SOFIAH BINTI ALMARHUM SULTAN IDRIS SHAH

31 JANUARI 2024 (19 REJAB 1445H)

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**Ahli Lembaga Pengarah,
Pengurusan dan Kakitangan**



Malayan Banking Berhad 196001000142 (3813-k)

State's economy continues to show positive progress

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It has been almost two years since you have been appointed as the Menteri Besar. What are your proud achievements? Any regrets during this time?

Among the notable achievements is that the state's economy continues to show positive progress. In terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), we hit the highest FDI in 2022 at RM70.6bil. Last year also showed a positive trend and we are still waiting for the results of 2023 to be announced soon. We are optimistic that the figures will show a positive trend too.

Our unemployment rate remains below 3%. So, economically, we are quite pleased and I believe we will continue to grow over the next few years, especially with the setting up of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Besides that, we also have the RTS project set for completion in 2026 and the North-South Highway widening project starting this year. The SDE highway and HSA 2 are also coming soon.

So, Johor's prospect looks good. I am really happy to say that we got a good base and we have got these infrastructure projects coming in to expand on that base to make sure our state can strive forward and continue to show good prospects.

On hindsight, I would not say I have any regrets but it has been challenging. Johor has a lot of potential and this potential has been said since I was a kid. So I would like to see this potential – this vision that we have, become a reality in the next few years.

It's good to talk about vision and potential, but we have to take action too. We all have to work as a team to make it a reality and I believe with the Tuanku as King and TMJ as Regent, this vision can be a reality.

You are known as someone who regularly carries out impromptu spot checks. Have these spot checks been fruitful in improving things on the ground, especially the two checkpoints? What are the main improvements in the state that you are proud of?

With regards to my spot checks, I believe that what is on paper does not necessarily translate to what is actually happening on the ground. That is why as leaders we must always be willing to get our hands dirty and see what is actually happening on the ground. For the two land checkpoints in Johor Baru and Second Link combined, I have conducted more than 80 visits now and most of the time I am there at 4am or 5am in the morning. I had to go so early in the initial stages as those were the times our people were leaving from Johor and travelling into Singapore.

Previously they used to wait for hours especially between two and three hours just to get to work and during their return. Now I am pleased to report that the waiting hours on average have gone down. So, if they used to wake up at 4am or 5am, now they can go to work at 6am and still reach the workplace before 8am.

So on average, we are looking



Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi obliging students with a wifie after presenting school aid to students in Simpang Renggam.

at saving two to three hours a day per person, especially at the Bangunan Sultan Iskandar Customs Immigration and Quarantine Complex (BSI).

For me, these two checkpoints are the pulse of Johor. It is not just about the 300,000 people, but the huge economic benefits. If you make it difficult for people to come, people won't come. If you make it easy for people to come, they will come.

The reason for the improvements at the checkpoints is because everyone has come on board to help reduce the congestion by making things a bit more efficient, namely by increasing the number of staff. Immigration has added approximately 200 new immigration officers. They have improved the system to clear each passport. I am not saying that the job is done. It is a continuous improvement initiative.

We are going to continue to add more automated M-bike lanes, more clearing lanes so that we can accommodate the increasing number of commuters who continue using our CIQ while waiting for the RTS to be completed by end of 2026. I am happy with what is happening, but at the same time, we are still taking steps and measures to improve on the CIQs. In fact, majority of the paperwork at the CIQs have been resolved.

For your information, in a few months time, there will be a new tender for another contractor to fund this facility more efficiently. I think the Home Ministry is tendering so that whoever comes in, whether it is the same person or another, the level of service commitment will be high to accommodate a huge volume of people.

At the same time, there are other things that we are looking at, because we cannot take the approach of saying that this is a Federal issue that needs to be resolved only by Federal agencies. It is not fair because all these facilities that we are using, whether it is the CIQs, the hospitals, the roads and other public assets, even though it is run by

the Federal Government, the state will also need to contribute because it is for Johoreans to use.

One improvement is with regards to roads. Previously the roads from Kota Tinggi to Mersing was like a real roller coaster, but I am glad to report to you that at least 80% of the roads have been repaired over the past one year. I am very happy with that progress. Obviously there are other areas that we are looking at for improvement.

But for JB, if you look at the city and the roads around the city, you can see major changes including reduction of potholes.

But as I said, there is always room for improvement. We are looking at other districts as well to make sure that all Johoreans reap the benefits of a better administration.

Your spot checks have been well received online and social media, especially Tiktok. Are the civil servants taking note and making improvements, or are they just behaving like business as usual?

They are definitely making and taking steps to improve. I work closely with the Home Ministry, its minister, secretary-general, directors-general and the agencies at the state level. They are giving full cooperation to get things done. There are some glitches here and there, and that is pretty normal but I think overall, I am very happy with how they are responding. I have never had to intervene in any particular case as I have full respect for the chain of command. Whatever complaints I received, whether it's online or directly given to me, I will not take any action on my own.

Obviously, I will have to go through the respective agencies for them to investigate and for them to take further action if necessary. In fact, I get feedback every day. I'm also often tagged on social media. It is never perfect, but the intention is to continuously improve, to get things done and to provide the best facilities for the people of Johor. I also welcome feedback from the public.

What else can be done to improve government machinery and the delivery system? How are you cutting bureaucracy and red tape in Johor to make it more investor-friendly?

With the formation of the special economic zone (SEZ), a lot of things can be resolved more efficiently. Now, why do I say this? Previously at state level, we had the Johor Fast Lane to encourage investors and businesses to thrive in Johor. The state agencies would combine forces to reduce red tape.

Now, with the SEZ there is a possibility, and as announced in the media, that we're thinking of having a one stop centre where both the Federal agencies and also the state agencies combine forces to manage and facilitate businesses coming in. So, businesses that have interest in Johor do not have to go through the various agencies such as the fire department, local council or land office for approvals. After this, we hope to have a collaboration between the state and Federal agencies.

The investors will only need to go to a one-stop centre and we will facilitate the investments through that channel. While it may sound like the role of the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (Irda), they do not cover certain incentives or handle all agencies. With this initiative, we will cover everything from Home Ministry, Finance Ministry, Ministry, International Trade and Investment Ministry (Miti) and state agencies. So, we calibrate everything and obviously there are going to be special incentives.

So far, since the announcement of the SEZ, there has been a lot of interest and feedback has been remarkable. I think if you noticed, even the property market is getting a lot of traction.

But having said that, I think the devil is in the details. That is why this collaboration between state and Federal ministries is very key. This is the first time it's going to be done properly because it's no longer just a state agenda. SEZ is a national project.

Johor is expected to benefit from the Special Economic Zone with Singapore, the RTS Link and My Second Home programme. What are your plans and focus to reap the benefits of these developments?

Well, personally I feel that the SEZ will be a catalyst to making Johor a developed state and the decision on type of industry, locations and incentives given, will create a lot of job opportunities. It will certainly create an ecosystem that is friendly to the business community. It will have an impact in terms of Research and Development (R&D) and will also help Johor develop as a financial centre. So, these are the things that I am looking forward to in terms of reaping the rewards for Johor. But we understand that it will be a win-win situation, not just for Johor, but for the country as a whole and also for Singapore. Because we cannot operate as rivals, we have to act as parties that complement each other and through complementing each other, all the economies involved will gain. I believe the new requirements for the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) are interesting but with the SEZ, hopefully Johor will have a special tier in this MM2H initiative. Actually we have proposed a few things to the Federal government and I am hoping they will study it and get back to us as soon as possible because as I said, these are all part of the details of SEZ, and the devil is in the details.

In the past you shared your vision for Johor, including the six pillars and the aim to make Johor a developed state by 2030. How are your plans coming along so far? What are the biggest achievements to date and also challenges?

We have the six pillars and I have placed equal importance on all of them. If you look at my budget speech in 2022 and 2023, the initiatives were broken down into the six pillars. In November 2023, I announced 29 strategies and 99 initiatives. I am especially happy because while we talk about developing the economy, we never forget our duty to help the ones who are in need, the poor and the youth.

We are looking at things like housing and building 30,000 affordable houses by the year 2026. I'm quite pleased with our outreach programmes where we are doing the Semarak Subuh every Friday mornings.

All the assemblymen are now waking up at 5am to go to the mosque, to meet and greet the people at their own areas. These are good progresses.

We are also working hard to eradicate extreme poverty. There are about 2,000 people and now each one of them have a foster family. There is an assemblyman taking care of each family. I myself have met all the eight families in my own area constituency. Our aim is to help them get out from extreme poverty.

We help them by making sure they get enough help from the relevant agencies, whether it's the welfare department or the religious department or from the state. If they are able physically, we will help them get a job.



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SALUTATIONS & HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS TO



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KING OF MALAYSIA**

&

**HER MAJESTY RAJA ZARITH SOFIAH,
QUEEN OF MALAYSIA**

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198301008880 (104131-A)



Long-standing advisors to the Sultan

By NELSON BENJAMIN
nelson@thestar.com.my

THE Johor Council of Royal Court, one of three bodies competent to advise Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, has been around since amendments to the state's constitution was made about 63 years ago.

The council, comprising 14 members including two appointed members who are ex-officio, advises His Majesty and the royal family on matters that are personal to them, that are in line with the constitution.

Council president Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Ramli, 83, said that the council was formed after the amendments were made in 1957.

"The royal council is custodian of all orders and medals. We are also in charge of all ceremonies and protocols in the palace. In other words, from the day you're born into the royal family until the day you die, the royal court looks after you," he said, adding that the royal court usually gave advice on the appointment of the Tunku Mahkota, the appointment of the Regent and also types of titles to be given to his children.

Dr Abdul Rahim said that the three committed bodies that could advise the Sultan include the Mentri Besar and the state executive council, president and council of royal court and the pardons board.

"We (royal court) do not interfere in any decisions that is competently given by the Mentri Besar or the state executive councillors. We also do not interfere in the appointment of the Mentri Besar or appointment of certain officers.

"Also the granting of Datukship is the absolute discretion of the Sultan, nobody can interfere in that too.

"The good thing about Sultan Ibrahim is that whatever he wants to do, he always asks for opinion. Whether Tuanku accepts or not, it doesn't matter, but most of the time Tuanku accepts it," Dr Abdul Rahim said, adding that most members of the council were former government servants.

Dr Abdul Rahim, who himself was a former Johor state secretary who has served in the council for the past 31 years, said that when he was the state secretary, he was an ex-officio of the council.

"This means I can attend the meetings but I have no vote. Only after I quit as state secretary in 1993 I was made a full member of the council," Dr Rahim said, adding that they were called many endearing names such as the inner circle and even hamba tua (old servants).

He said that the council members were all given honorary titles of Yang Berhormat, similar to the titles given by Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar Ibni Temenggong Tun Daeng Ibrahim to his Cabinet members in 1862.

Asked as to whether the royal court will move to Kuala Lumpur once Sultan Ibrahim becomes King or continue to stay in Johor to assist the new Regent, Dr Abdul Rahim said that all that depended on His Majesty.

"Tuanku has expressed his desire that if he wants any advice, either we go up there or have an audience with him when he comes down to Johor.

"I'm sure we will continue to be in touch as he is still the Johor Ruler. We will continue to serve him," he said, adding that they would also continue to serve the

Members of the Johor Council of Royal Court	
President:	Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Ramli
Secretary:	Datuk Abdul Latiff Yusof
Members	
	Datuk Dr Nooh Gadot
	Brig General (Rtd) Datuk Ali Musa
	Datuk Daing A. Malek Daing A. Rahaman
	General (Rtd) Tan Sri Muhammad Ismail Jamaluddin
	Tunku Mahmood Shah Ibni Almarhum Tunku Mohamad
	Datuk Obet Tawil
	Datuk Ismail Karim
	Datuk Mohd Halim Hasbullah
	Datuk Ishak Sahari
	Prof Datuk Dr Kassim Thukiman
Appointed members of the council (Ex-Officio)	
	Tunku Temenggong Tunku Idris Iskandar
	Al-Haj Ibni Sultan Ibrahim
	Johor state secretary Tan Sri Dr Azmi Rohani

Regent as well.

Dr Abdul Rahim, who has served three Johor Sultans and two Kings including Sultan Ibrahim during his tenure in Johor, said that his main guiding principle was to serve with integrity, loyalty, to always be truthful and always remember Allah.

"I was born in a poor family about eight days after the Japanese landed in Malaya on Dec 16, 1941.

"It was a tough time as food was scarce but we never forgot the values instilled by our late parents," he said, adding that he and his 12 siblings, who are all still around, were all close and united.

Asked about his past experience in the government service, Dr Abdul Rahim who has a Honours Degree in Economics said that he joined the Johor civil service as a young officer when he was 23 years old.

"I have served in various positions in the state but my work in the Johor palace started when I was made the steward in charge of carrying the silver salver where the speech text is placed during the reign of Sultan Ismail Ibni Almarhum Sultan Ibrahim.

"Prior to my appointment as state secretary at the age of 45, I was also the state financial officer under Sultan Iskandar Ibni Almarhum Sultan Ismail," he said, adding that he has known Sultan Ibrahim since he was eight years old.

Dr Abdul Rahim, who was forced to quit in 1993 after serving six years as state secretary, said that he had to leave due to the political manoeuvring and pressure from the government at that time.

"I had to leave because of my loyalty to the Johor ruler and the royal family. The final straw which led me to file for optional retirement was when I was instructed to return my official car JCS 1 and my children saw the car being towed away in the news on the television.

"It was a difficult and painful move as I had four more years to retire. But I have never regretted the move," he said, adding that during that period, many of his friends had also abandoned him as they did not want to be associated with him.

Dr Abdul Rahim said that it was a dark period for the country at that time as it started with the sacking of the Lord



Dr Abdul Rahim with one of his five books that he has written at his office in Bukit Timbalan in Johor Baru. — THOMAS YONG/The Star



Dr Abdul Rahim explaining the functions and roles of the royal court to *The Star's* News Editor Nelson Benjamin.

President Tun Salleh Abas in 1988.

"It was a political plot to bring down and reduce the powers of the Rulers in 1992. For Johor they wanted to disband the Johor Military Forces (JMF), curb the Ruler's expenses and then stopped public servants to have an audience or any connection with the royalty.

"They also wanted to restrict Johor royalty's travel to Singapore by asking them to get customs and immigration clearances and stopped them from meeting the people," he said, adding that as state secretary, he also found it difficult to even organise the Sultan's birthday party.

He said that he resisted all this attempts against the Ruler as he had taken an oath of loyalty and talk was rife of attempts to remove or even arrest him.

(As a result of him tendering his resignation in 1993, Dr Abdul Rahim only gets 50% of the pension that he is entitled till this day.)

"I always believe in God and the silver lining that came about from that episode was that I learnt to do all my chores by myself including driving, paying bills and mowing the lawn," he joked.

Dr Abdul Rahim credited the royal family for looking after him including being appointed as a full member of the Johor Royal Court and later on as its secretary.

"When Sultan Ibrahim was the Tunku Mahkota, he gave me moral support and came to the house every other weekend to personally talk to me and encourage me.

"When Tuanku became the Johor Ruler, he made me council president in 2014 and even renovated my old state secretary office in Bukit Timbalan and furnished it at his expense for me to be used as my office now," he said, adding that His Majesty also gave him an official car.

Dr Abdul Rahim, who has written five

books mostly on Johor's history, the history of the royals, on protocols, on the culture of the palace and on ceremonies, hopes to impart his knowledge to the younger generation especially Bangsa Johor, to strengthen their beliefs and trust in the institution of royalty.

"So far I have helped organise six weddings and six funerals. But the biggest task was organising Sultan Ibrahim's coronation in 2015, as we did not have a coronation for 52 years and could not refer to anyone who was still alive from the previous one.

"We had to plan the ceremony using documents, photographs and videos," he said, adding that he also had to fly to London at least three times to refurbish the crown jewels.

Dr Abdul Rahim vividly remembers shedding a tear on the coronation day on March 23 as everything went smoothly.

"I felt a sense of accomplishment as I had completed the mission entrusted by the late Sultan Iskandar to lead his son (TMJ at that time in 1993) by the hand and to make sure he turns out to be a respectable Ruler," he said, adding that it was an honour for him to serve the royal family.

On the royal family including the children, Dr Abdul Rahim who has two of his own kids, said that they were all humble and down-to-earth.

"In fact, there was one time when I attended a garden party, and a guest of foreign royalty asked me whether the Sultan and royal family walk around with no escort and mingle with the crowd freely," he said, adding that this was the uniqueness of the Johor Royalty.

Dr Abdul Rahim is confident that His Majesty would be a fair king as it was inborn in him to look after the welfare of each citizen.



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SULTAN IBRAHIM IBNI ALMARHUM SULTAN ISKANDAR**

&

**KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SERI PADUKA BAGINDA RAJA PERMAISURI AGONG,
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Ketua-Ketua Jabatan Negeri, Persekutuan dan Daerah di Negeri Johor
Serta seluruh Warga Kerja Perkhidmatan Awam Negeri Johor

A leader who walks the talk



Lee said that Sultan Ibrahim's years of experience in serving Johoreans and his unique position allowed him to give valuable and insightful advice to the exco.



Mohd Jafni said the state government is working towards realising Sultan Ibrahim's hope to see more Johoreans being able to get affordable homes.



Ling said that Sultan Ibrahim constantly reminded all excos that they are where they are because of the rakyat.



Mohd Hairi said that Sultan Ibrahim is a Ruler who takes the welfare of Johoreans very seriously.



Norliza said that Sultan Ibrahim takes a great interest in education as he sees it as an important element for the state to move forward.



Mohd Fared said Sultan Ibrahim's openness to ideas and his endless valuable advice have motivated him to go above and beyond in carrying out his duties.



Zahari said that Sultan Ibrahim takes the development of Johor, including rural areas very seriously.



Raven said that Sultan Ibrahim has always used his voice as the Johor Ruler to champion good causes and highlight the plight of the people.



Mohamad Fazli said that Sultan Ibrahim's focus has always been on improving the lives of the rakyat.



Khairin-Nisa said that Sultan Ibrahim is very in tune with the rakyat and always wants what is best for them.

By **VENESA DEVI**
venesa@thestar.com.my

A LEADER who walks the talk and always puts the people first, that is how Johor state executive councillors (exco) have described Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar.

Since taking their oaths in March 2022, the line-up of 10 exco members has been given the privilege of receiving advice and guidance from Sultan Ibrahim, a Ruler who has earned a reputation as a wise leader worldwide.

The Star spoke to the excos to find out more about Sultan Ibrahim through their eyes.

State investment, trade and consumer affairs committee chairman Lee Ting Han said that Sultan Ibrahim's years of experience in serving Johoreans and his unique position allowed him to give valuable and insightful advice to the exco.

"Unlike politicians who come and go, His Majesty has been around for Johoreans for many years. He has seen a lot and knows so much about the state and its people.

"The insight he shares with us is very unique as it comes from his years of experience. Sultan Ibrahim has seen so many Mentri Besar, Prime Ministers

and foreign leaders, allowing him to see things we could never see.

"As such, his views are very valuable and important for us as they help guide us in carrying out our duties and developing the state," he said.

He said that the advice Sultan Ibrahim has always given him and his fellow excos is to focus on implementation rather than just planning.

"He has seen so many plans, proposals and policies from dozens of leaders. For him, all of that is not that important. What is important is that we can deliver what we promise and honour our commitments.

"No matter how good the plan is or how well we present it, all of it will not matter if we cannot deliver," he said.

He added that Sultan Ibrahim has also stressed to him and even publicly, the need for policies that could attract more investment into Johor.

"The flip-flop of policies in the past, including on the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) programme, has driven investors away. Since we became exco in 2022, he told us that we really need to be as open as possible to bring in investors for the sake of Johor. We need to instil the confidence of investors," he said.

Johor housing and local government committee chairman Datuk Mohd Jafni Md Shukor said the state government is working towards realising Sultan Ibrahim's hope to see more Johoreans being able to get affordable homes.

"Sultan Ibrahim has asked me to come out with a plan and work towards providing more affordable homes that suit the financial ability of the people.

"His Majesty also reminded me to constantly monitor the quality of work the developers are giving for these homes. Alhamdulillah, with His Majesty's guidance, we have been able to provide thousands of affordable homes for the people in the past two years and will continue to do so," he said.

Mohd Jafni said that the state government has set a goal to have some 5,123 affordable homes completed by the end of this year and that a total of 13,937 were completed in the last two years.

"InsyaAllah, we will be able to reach our goal of building at least 30,000 affordable homes by the year 2026," he added.

Johor health and unity committee chairman Ling Tian Soon said that Sultan Ibrahim constantly reminded all excos that they are where they are because

of the rakyat.

"Sultan Ibrahim always reminded us that we are elected by the rakyat who has faith in us, who trusts that we will be able to serve them and the state the best that we can.

"As such, as an exco member, we should just keep our minds clear and focus on the job. As simple as that.

"Do not do any hanky-panky, focus on addressing the people's issues and serving them. That is the advice the Sultan has repeatedly told us," he said.

Ling also thanked the Johor Sultan for his relentless effort to push for the establishment of a new hospital in Johor Baru, a need that is a long time coming.

"We have Sultan Ibrahim to thank for the Hospital Sultanah Aminah 2 (HSA 2) project. His Majesty plays a pivotal role in realising this dream that is shared by many Johoreans and the state government.

"Every time His Majesty meets the Health Minister and the Prime Minister, he will bring up HSA 2 to them without fail. We may not be able to see this project happening if it was not for our Johor Sultan," he said.

Johor youth, sports, entrepreneur development, cooperatives and human resources committee chairman Mohd Hairi Mad Shah

said that Sultan Ibrahim is a Ruler who takes the welfare of Johoreans very seriously.

"For Sultan Ibrahim, taking care of the needs and welfare of the people are the most important things a leader must do.

"That has always been his advice to us, to prioritise the people above everything else. He wants us to focus on our job of improving the lives of Johoreans and bringing the state forward.

"I take His Majesty's words very seriously and strive to do just that," he said, adding that the Johor Sultan is a leader who walks the talk.

Johor education, information and communication committee chairman Norliza Noh said that Sultan Ibrahim takes a great interest in education as he sees it as an important element for the state to move forward.

"Education is something that is very close to His Majesty's heart. He wants Johoreans to have all the opportunities available to get a good education.

"With that, we will be able to create a generation of youngsters who are skilful and bright," she said.

She added that the Johor Ruler also takes the welfare of students and educators very seriously.

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Plantation

Exco laud Sultan’s visionary leadership

> FROM PAGE 16

“Heeding His Majesty’s advice, we will strive towards improving the quality of the educational institution in Johor,” she added.

State Islamic religious affairs committee chairman Mohd Fared Mohd Khalid said Sultan Ibrahim’s openness to ideas and his endless valuable advice have motivated him to go above and beyond in carrying out his duties.

“His Majesty told me to encourage more young people to go to mosques and surau.

“Heeding Tuanku’s advice, I started a plan to digitalise the mosques and surau in Johor by providing free Wi-Fi.

“Through this initiative, all the 838 mosques and 1,942 surau statewide are able to enjoy the Wi-Fi in stages starting from last year until 2027.

“This has not only encouraged youngsters to make use of the facility available in the mosques

and surau but also allowed digitalisation to take place in the house of Allah,” he said.

He added that another initiative that was started to achieve a similar objective was the Semarak Subuh programme, which was announced in Johor Budget 2024.

“The programme encourages Johor assemblymen to perform the subuh prayer with the people in mosques and surau for the entire 52 Fridays this year.

“The programme has also become a national phenomenon when some 12,000 congregations attended the subuh prayer at Masjid Sultan Iskandar Bandar Dato Onn on Jan 19,” he said.

State agriculture, agro-based industry, and rural committee chairman Datuk Zahari Sarip said that Sultan Ibrahim takes the development of Johor, including rural areas, very seriously.

“His Majesty wants Johoreans, regardless of whether they are living in the urban or rural area,

to be able to experience development and benefit from them.

“As we strive to make Johor a developed state by 2030, we have also been reminded to ensure that the people could actually benefit from these developments.

“Sultan Ibrahim also takes a great interest in the agricultural industry, which will allow Johor to be self-reliant and secure food security,” he said.

Johor tourism, environment, heritage, and culture committee chairman K. Raven Kumar said that Sultan Ibrahim has always used his voice as the Johor Ruler to champion good causes and highlight the plight of the people.

“Sultan Ibrahim is a very hands-on leader who understands the plight of the people very well and always works towards ensuring that they receive the best of everything.

“Sultan Ibrahim has also used his voice as the Johor Sultan to champion all kinds of good causes, including environmental

issues. The Ruler takes such issues very seriously as it affects the health and future of the people. On top of that, Tuanku also constantly reminds Johoreans to stay united and to not look at race or religion,” he said.

Johor works, transportation, and infrastructure committee chairman Mohamad Fazli Mohamad Salleh said that Sultan Ibrahim’s focus has always been on improving the lives of the rakyat.

“When His Majesty meets any Federal Ministers, he will bring up issues that are affecting the people of Johor.

“For Tuanku, that is the most important thing – making the lives of Johoreans better.

“Even when there were complaints and issues about the federal roads in Johor, Tuanku brought up the matter to the minister involved,” he said.

He added that the Johor Sultan had played a very important role in ensuring that Johor received

the necessary attention from the Federal Government for its development.

Johor women’s family and community development committee chairman Khairin-Nisa Ismail said that Sultan Ibrahim is very in tune with the rakyat and always wants what is best for them.

“Sultan Ibrahim and the whole royal family take the welfare of the rakyat very seriously. We can see this clearly just by looking at the countless charitable acts they have done for the people.

“The royal family are also always the first to speak out against any kind of abuse, especially those involving children.

“As the exco who is in charge of the people’s welfare, Sultan Ibrahim has always reminded me to be hands-on and ensure that the agencies under me are doing all that they could to help the people,” she said, adding that she is heeding the Sultan’s advice.

Origins of Johor’s beloved anthem

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH
farhaan@thestar.com.my

IT is a song that is always sung by every Johorean by heart but not many know the origin of the state anthem, *Lagu Bangsa Johor*, which can be traced back some 110 years ago.

The *Lagu Bangsa Johor* is not only sung at schools during assembly but also before government events and at Johor Darul Ta’zim (JDT) football games, both at Sultan Ibrahim Stadium and the club away matches.

Johor Royal Court Council member Datuk Dr Kassim Thukiman said that in the late 19th century, there was a song named *Selamat Sultan* during the reign of Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar Ibni Almarhum Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim.

“Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar, also known as the father of modern Johor, really liked the *Selamat Sultan* song, which was composed by Johor Military Force (JMF) bandmaster M. Galistan but the song had no lyrics to it.

“However, in 1914, an Englishman named Hubert A. Courtney, a manager with HSBC Bank in Johor Baru back then, had written the lyrics in English and it was translated into Malay by Major Datuk Muhd Said Sulaiman, who was assisted by JMF drum major Abdul Rahim Abdul Karim.

“The song was named *Lagu Johor* and was accepted by Johor’s second ruler Almarhum Sultan Sir Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar,” he added.

Kassim said that Almarhum Sultan Sir Ibrahim wanted to unite all races in the state who then decreed that the song would be named *Lagu Bangsa Johor*.

He added that the song was then approved and endorsed by the Johor state secretary at the time, Datuk Mohamed Mahbob, and British general advisor



Johor’s state anthem ‘Lagu Bangsa Johor’ is memorised by heart by all Johoreans regardless of race. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

Douglas G. Campbell a year later before being accepted by Almarhum Sultan Sir Ibrahim.

Kassim, who is also a Yayasan Warisan Johor board member and local historian, said that in the book titled *Selamat Johor* written by Datuk Onn Jaafar, who was Umno’s founding father and former Johor mentri besar, it stated that the initial name for the song was *Selamat Sultan* but the song underwent name changes before being the official song for the Johor modern sultanate.

“If we look at it from a national point of view, Johor has created many basic matters of statehood such as the Undang Undang Tubuh Kerajaan Johor 1895, education system including for

Islamic religion, legal system, military system, and many more.

“This also includes the official song for the state, which is known as *Lagu Bangsa Johor*, which is known till this day.

“So officially, when Almarhum Sultan Sir Ibrahim accepted the song in 1915, it was also the first time the song was played publicly,” he added.

Kassim also said that when going through the lyrics of *Lagu Bangsa Johor*, it has never been changed for more than 110 years.

He added that this shows the *Lagu Bangsa Johor* lyrics are eternal in nature because it covers every aspect related to the existence of a sovereignty and the ruling of a sultan with the

patronage of the people being led.

“In fact, the term merdeka (independent) is mentioned in the song, which proves the British recognised the state’s sovereignty of an administration under the ruling of the Johor modern sultanate,” he said.

Kassim also said that *Lagu Bangsa Johor* was the official song of the Johor sultanate where the people, in particular students, have been given guidelines to sing the state song, together with *Negaraku*, during their school assembly.

“The song is sung on a daily basis at every school in Johor and this is why every Johorean knows the lyrics by heart from young to old,” he added.



Kassim said the song ‘Lagu Bangsa Johor’ was written some 110 years ago.



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Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Foundation (TLJCF) chairperson Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah (second from left) visiting a cancer patient in Taman Desa Jaya, Johor Baru. Also present is Johor Women Civil Servants Association (Puspanita) chairman Puan Sri Datin Dr Noor Azizah Abdul Latiff (left).



Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah (centre) taking photo with cancer survivors during the Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebration last year at Menara MBBJ, Johor Baru.

Providing aid to cancer patients

By REMAR NORDIN

remar.nordin@thestar.com.my

THE Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Foundation (TLJCF) has spent almost RM11.4mil to help 3,718 cancer patients from 2016 until last year.

TLJCF chief executive officer Mohd Ikmal Izam Zaini said the expenses involved medication aid, medical equipment aid, specialised milk aid, Positron Emission Tomography scan aid, and financial aid in terms of transportation bills.

The cancer patients may also apply for one-off financial aid up to RM500 to pay for their transportation needs, which will encourage them to get their treatment once they have been diagnosed, he added.

"There are cases where patients living in rural areas such as Pontian and Batu Pahat have to travel all the way to HSA or HSI in Johor Baru every week, so these aids will help alleviate some of their financial costs.

"We provided this aid after finding out that there are patients who refuse to get their treatment because they cannot afford to travel," he said when met at his office in Kota Iskandar.

Mohd Ikmal added that each patient can make their application through the Medical Social Work Department at selected government hospitals in Johor.

TLJCF is also planning to conduct more cancer awareness programmes this year, as the foundation believes that the level of awareness amongst the local Johoreans is still low, he informed.

"We usually have three main awareness events every year, namely World Cancer Day, the Corporate Cancer Awareness Programme, and the Be Bold Programme.

"The Corporate Cancer Awareness Programme involved us giving cancer awareness talks to interested companies.

"While the Be Bold Programme was more of a family day where the cancer patients are invited in this programme and they get to do fun activities together so they get to know each other and give support between them and their family members.

"By comparison, we believed that the local awareness of cancer is still not up to par; other



A nurse checking up on a patient at the Tunku Laksamana Johor Haematology Ward at Sultanah Aminah Hospital, Johor Baru.



A Cancer Support Group under TLJCF giving moral support to a patient during one of their Home Visit programmes in Tangkak, Muar.



Mohd Ikmal (centre) taking a group photo with the participants of the Think Pink and Be Bold programme held at Hutan Bandar Mutiara Rini, Johor Baru. — All pix by Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Foundation

foreign countries have now shifted their focus to early detection and urged their people to go for annual health checks," he added.

Besides the awareness programme, TLJCF will also be continuing its monthly home visit programme together with its Cancer Support Group, which consists of 200 cancer patients and cancer survivors.

"What they do is usually give each other moral support and share sessions between them on their dietary intake and lifestyle, and at the same time, family support plays a crucial role in helping cancer patients go through their treatment.

"We find that cancer patients have a higher chance of recover-

ing if they have the needed support from their family, husband or wife, and even their children; this will help reduce their stress and boost their morale to get cured," he said.

Mohd Ikmal also shared that these sessions are sometimes joined by TLJCF chairperson Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah.

"The patients would be overwhelmed with the presence of Her Majesty; they would feel appreciated and often boost their spirits to come forward for treatment.

"Although these visits are only about 15 minutes, the positive impact goes beyond," he said, adding that the foundation will

also work with the Raja Zarith Sofiah of Johor Foundation (YRZSNJ) to provide for the patient's needs.

"The foundation is also targeting RM1.5mil to be spent this year, which will help fund the medication for the cancer patients who are in need. We hope to be able to get more funds so that we can share our help with more cancer patients.

"Last year, we managed to spend RM1mil from the donations, which have helped 577 cancer patients in the state."

Mohd Ikmal also shared that TLJCF is also planning to upgrade two new Oncology Treatment Centres this year in two districts, namely Sultanah Nora Ismail Hospital in Batu Pahat and

Segamat Hospital.

Mohd Ikmal explained that Sultanah Nora Ismail Hospital already has an Oncology Daycare Unit, and upgrading works began last December and are expected to be completed by March of this year.

"For now, we have already upgraded three Oncology Treatment Centres, namely the Tunku Laksamana Johor Complex at Permai Hospital, the Tunku Laksamana Johor Haematology Ward at Sultanah Aminah Hospital, and the Tunku Laksamana Johor Foundation Oncology Treatment Centre at Sultanah Fatimah Specialist Hospital in Muar.

"So once completed, it will help cater for cancer patients from the northern part of Johor, and they no longer need to travel down to HSA or HSI," he said.

As for the Segamat Hospital, TLJCF is currently planning the centre facilities, which are expected to be completed by the end of this year, he added.

"We will be using their former emergency unit department and turning it into our daycare centre, where patients can come for their chemotherapy session at ease and provide room for their family to rest as well.

"So this is our target for this year; we not only want to provide cancer patients with medical and facility aid, but we also wanted to provide them with extra comfort when they go for treatment along with their families," he said, adding that the foundation is also planning to set up and upgrade another centre in Kluang next year.



DAULAT TUANKU

SALUTATIONS & HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS TO



**HIS MAJESTY SULTAN IBRAHIM,
KING OF MALAYSIA**

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**HER MAJESTY RAJA ZARITH SOFIAH,
QUEEN OF MALAYSIA**

31st JANUARY 2024 (19th REJAB 1445H)

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Coronation Square anchors RTS Link

BY NELSON BENJAMIN
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CORONATION Square is set to be an integral part of the Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link between Johor Baru and Singapore as it will be connected via an elevated walkway and also house about 700 parking bays for the rail link project.

Coronade Properties Sdn Bhd sales manager Ong Tee Hui said that connectivity was paramount in this fully integrated development, which would include elevated walkways and flyovers among major roads such as Jalan Tebrau and Jalan Tun Abdul Razak.

"We are building a 210m walkway to the RTS. There will also be a 250m walkway from Persada Johor to the Bangunan Sultan Ibrahim Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) complex," she said, adding that the other link was funded by the Public Private Partnership Unit or Ukas under the Prime Minister's Department.

Ong added that in future there would also be connectivity between RTS and the present CIQ complex.

"All these connections will form a loop and it makes us an ideal location for those wanting to commute between Johor Baru and Singapore," she said, adding that there has been a lot of interest in their projects especially with the recent announcement



The Coronade Residences, which was launched in February last year, is 95% taken up.

that the RTS project was 65% completed and visits by prime ministers from both countries.

Ong added that their sales gallery here is packed during weekends as people are confident that the RTS project would be completed on time by the end of 2026.

Mass Rapid Transit Sdn Bhd (MRT Corp) chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Zarif Hashim in a recent interview said that the RM5bil RTS project would have immense spillover benefits and could attract five times more investments, totalling RM25bil, into the country.

The RTS can ferry about 10,000 passengers per hour per direction.

On the progress of their project

under Phase One, Ong said that 2024 is an exciting year as the 35-storey Bank Rakyat tower was 99% completed and would be handed over in the coming months.

"Our 551-unit The Coronade Residences, which we launched in February last year is also 95% taken up with 84% of the purchasers being locals while the remaining 16% were foreigners," she said, adding that their 30-storey KPJ Wellness Centre was also 75% completed.

Ong said that they are now in the midst of looking at launching Phase Two of their project mid of this year.

"We are the only integrated development in the heart of the city which has all the different

components such as residential, service apartments, hotels, financial tower, healthcare and even a mall," she said, adding that their project would comprise six towers.

On pricing, she said that residential units for their first phase was sold at RM1,200 per sq/foot onwards and in the next phase, she was optimistic that the price would be more than RM1,300 per sq/foot.

"We believe that Johor Baru has the potential to continue growing especially with the completion of the RTS," she said, adding that their integrated development, which is flanked by Jalan Wong Ah Fook and Jalan Trus, has an estimated gross development value of RM5bil.



Ong said that in future, there would also be connectivity between RTS and the present CIQ complex.

In 2015, Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar of Johor launched the Ibrahim International Business District (IIBD) transformation plan to redevelop or regenerate about 101ha within the city centre.

His Majesty in the past has not only stressed on the importance of Coronation Square and RTS but also on the importance of a good traffic system in the vicinity.

Ong said that to date they have spent a substantial sum to build roads, ramps and infrastructure to help disperse traffic as they did not want the area to be congested in the future.

"We have also invested to improve the underground drainage system especially along Jalan Trus," she said, adding that their project also comes with almost 5,000 parking bays.

Embarking on expansion

By ZAZALI MUSA
metro@thestar.com.my

THE Johor Baru-headquartered Joland Group of Companies (Joland Group) has diversified its business since venturing into property development in 1990.

Over the years, Joland Group has developed a range of high-rise projects (e.g. Paragon Residences@Straits View and Paragon Suites@CIQ).

Commercial projects (e.g. Grand Paragon Johor Baru, Paragon Market Place, etc.) and industrial projects (e.g. Bizhub Skudai 8, Pekan Nanas Industrial Park phase 1 and phase 2, etc).

Joland Group is determined and committed to consistently deliver excellent properties and value-added services to its buyers and investors; and aim not just meeting but also exceeding their expectations.

As part of its aggressive plan to grow the **PARAGON** brand, which simply means "a model of excellence" and to bring its brand to a greater height in the years to come, Joland Group has embraced more challenges and further diversified into the education sector.

Paragon Private and International School which is in Plentong, Johor, started its operation in 2017, as a joint-venture between Joland Group and Kuopacific Group.

The school was started with

the aim to mould leaders for tomorrow.

During the same year, Joland Group crossed an important milestone when one of its member companies, Paragon Adventure Sdn Bhd, acquired 51.807% of the equity interest in Goh Ban Huat Berhad in September 2017.

The rebranding and re-strategising of the business direction commenced thereafter with the diversification into property development and construction activities.

In 2018, it changed its name to Paragon Globe Berhad [194801000095(1713-A)] (PGB).

PGB embarked its journey in industrial development when it acquired several parcels of land in Pekan Nanas Industrial Park in Pontian, Johor.

Its Pekan Sentral project aims to bolster the economy of Pekan Nanas and create job opportunities for the residents of Pekan Nanas and the Pontian district.

Currently, PGB has several projects planned while Joland Group is developing the Paragon Gateway, a mixed development located just next to Tebrau Highway.

The strategic location is particularly convenient for people working in Singapore, especially for those who regularly make the daily round trip between Johor Baru and Singapore.

Paragon Gateway is a joint-venture development between Joland Group and

Kuopacific Group Malaysia.

Nestled on 5.24 acres of freehold land located in Taman Suria, Johor Baru, Paragon Gateway has an estimated gross development value (GDV) of approximately RM1.2bil.

It comprises a total of four towers of serviced apartments, with 45 stories in Tower A and B, and 47 stories in Tower C and D.

In total, there are 2,136 units of serviced apartments and 48 units of retail shops.

Recently, PGB through its wholly-owned subsidiary of PGB, has proposed to acquire eight parcels of freehold land, approximately 46.904ha which are in the Mukim of Tanjung Kupang, Johor Baru, and Mukim of Pulai, Johor Baru, for RM146,071,898.47 on Nov 17, 2023.

PGB is actively involved in the development of Selgate Hospital Sepang for Selgate Healthcare Sdn Bhd (Selgate Healthcare).

The Selgate Hospital Sepang, with 121 beds, is to be built on 7.07 acres of land, operated and leased by Selgate Healthcare for 15 years with an option to extend for another 15 years.

The construction commenced in 2021 and is slated for completion by the end of 2024.

As Joland Group and PGB expand their respective business portfolios and launch new projects, they remain committed to uphold its business principles and deliver homes and spaces with premier quality and livea-



Paragon Gateway, a mixed development, is strategically located next to Tebrau Highway with an estimated gross development value of RM1.2bil.



The 121-bed Selgate Sepang Hospital which started construction in 2021 is slated for completion by the end of 2024.

bility to its customers, investors and business partners.

■ For more information, visit

Joland Group and PGB's website at www.jolandgroup.com.my and www.pgbgroup.com.my respectively.



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Property



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Bridging the gap between races



Ahsmrit (centre) with Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi (right) and state tourism, environment, heritage and culture committee chairman K. Raven Kumar (left) during a Bangsa Johor Deepavali programme in 2023.



Lim (standing) having a community discussion about issues concerning the public, as part of his role to foster better relations among the people.

By YEE XIANG YUN
xiangyun@thestar.com.my

AS one of the appointed unity ambassadors of Johor, Lim San Shien has always drawn inspiration from Sultan Ibrahim ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar.

Lim said the Johor Sultan, who has just been sworn in as the 17th King, is known for being vocal about various issues concerning the rakyat, including the topic of unity.

"Through the Ruler's decrees and public statements, he has always advocated for peace, harmony and unity among the people regardless of our differences.

"Now that Tuanku is the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, I hope that his good values will inspire all Malaysians throughout the country to become more united," he said.

Lim, a law student currently undergoing chambering, said he was among the first batch of youths who took part in the state's unity ambassador programme in July 2022.

"As unity ambassadors, our role is to bridge the gap between people of different races and backgrounds, as well as age groups to forge stronger ties as Johoreans and Malaysians.

"To achieve this objective, we were free to carry out programmes of our own choice such as community farming and forums.

"As youths, I believe we can play a stronger part in helping to foster stronger ties with others through various means whether it is community programmes or through social media," said Lim.

Through his engagements with others, he noted that Bahasa Malaysia, which is the national language, is one of the best tools to unite the people.



Lim leading the Rukun Negara recital during a programme recently.

Another unity ambassador, 27-year-old Ahsmrit Singh Paranjit Singh said he was proud to be one of the first ones to be appointed in the programme.

He added that as a unity ambassador, he often had to explain to others about his own culture as there were some who did not know much about the Punjabis.

"It gave me an opportunity to share my culture with others. I usually get a lot of questions about my appearance and the festive days I observe as a Sikh.

"I will gladly explain why I wear a turban and the significance of it. People also often asked if my religion was the same as Hindu, which I will say that Sikhs like me celebrate Vaisakhi and not Deepavali like the Hindus," said Ahsmrit, who has been involved in social work for the past 14 years.

He added that he has partici-

pated in various activities concerning the Sikh community as well as distributing food aid to the less privileged including during Covid-19.

He said one of his memorable experiences was helping flood victims in Kuala Krai, Kelantan, in 2014 where his team also stayed on to assist with post-flood clean ups.

Ahsmrit, who works as a public relations officer at a private company, noted that Malaysia is a caring society but there were times when the country's unity was challenged by insensitive individuals.

"I recall once, while I was a student at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, our bus broke down on the way to an event and we were all worried that we were unable to make it in time.

"Then came a factory bus where the driver offered to send us to our destination. He did not



Sabariah wants to promote unity through sports. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

have to do it but he still went out of his way to help us; it was a touching and memorable experience for me," he said.

Meanwhile, 23-year-old Sabariah Mohd Said, who had just been appointed as a unity ambassador on Jan 13, hopes to play a role in spreading positivity to those around her.

"Although I am from Manir, Terengganu, I believe in the Bangsa Johor spirit after studying in Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia for the past three years. The concept is one that is unique to the state.

"I am excited to be appointed as one of the second batch of unity ambassadors and I am sure I can carry the spirit with me when I return to my hometown after completing my degree in vocational education (catering)," said the aspiring teacher.

Sabariah said one of her plans

to promote unity is through sports.

"Healthy activities such as team sports have the ability to bring people of various backgrounds together to strive for a common goal.

"Similarly, if Malaysians can put aside their differences and learn to be more understanding and tolerate one another, we can achieve unity and harmony without the need to dwell on sensitive topics.

"I also believe I can learn a lot of new experiences by engaging with different communities, which will be useful to me when I enter the workforce in future," said Sabariah.

The Unity Ambassador Programme, introduced by the state government in 2022, appointed 150 ambassadors in its first batch followed by 157 in the second batch.



DAULAT TUANKU

MERAFAK SEMBAH UCAPAN SETINGGI-TINGGI TAHNIAH KEPADA



KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SERI PADUKA BAGINDA YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG,
SULTAN IBRAHIM IBNI ALMARHUM SULTAN ISKANDAR

&

KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SERI PADUKA BAGINDA RAJA PERMAISURI AGONG,
RAJA ZARITH SOFIAH BINTI ALMARHUM SULTAN IDRIS SHAH

31 JANUARI 2024 (19 REJAB 1445H)

Sembah Takzim Daripada:



Mass Rapid Transit Corporation Sdn Bhd (902884V)
Malaysia Rapid Transit System Sdn Bhd (1353462-M)

Warm welcome to the new King

JOHOREANS from all walks of life from all 10 districts statewide extend their warm wishes to their beloved Ruler, Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar as His Majesty begins his five-year term as the 17th Yang di-Pertuan Agong.



“ I met Sultan Ibrahim for the first time in March last year when His Majesty visited a temporary flood relief centre in Sri Gading. From the way Tuanku talks to the flood victims, I can see that Tuanku is a very kind person with a gentle soul. I believe Sultan Ibrahim will be a great Yang di-Pertuan Agong, and I wish His Majesty the best of luck. ”

K. Ravinthiran
Plantation manager, 62, Batu Pahat



“ Sultan Ibrahim is a very open-minded person who loves and respects his subjects regardless of race and religion. Tuanku always reminds Johoreans about the importance of racial harmony. I hope that His Majesty will help to strengthen the spirit of all Malaysians as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. ”

Yeo Fong Lim
Café owner, 65, Kluang



“ Johoreans are lucky to have Sultan Ibrahim as our Ruler, and now, all Malaysians will also be able to experience the same blessings with His Majesty as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. ”

Mohd Azib Daniel Suhaimi
Student, 15, Kota Tinggi



“ I have not met Sultan Ibrahim in person, but I am well aware of Tuanku's generosity and kindness as Tuanku always comes down to the ground to meet his subjects whenever there is a crisis. May His Majesty be blessed with good health throughout his term as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. ”

Tan Chit Boon
Estate manager, 63, Segamat



“ As the Johor Ruler, Sultan Ibrahim always strives for equal education opportunities for all children. Therefore, as an educator, I am hoping for a unified set of values and beliefs in the Malaysian education system under His Majesty's rule. This will foster a high-performing learning culture for Malaysia's younger generation. ”

Nurul Fatin Amalina Zainuddin
Teacher, 39, Tangkak



“ Sultan Ibrahim is a Ruler who is very close to his people and has always been the first to lend a helping hand whenever Johoreans are in need. With His Majesty as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, I believe Tuanku will extend his kindness to all Malaysians. ”

S. Sures
Businessman, 51, Johor Baru



“ As a Johorean, I truly appreciate Sultan Ibrahim for the kindness and generosity he has shown the people here. I am sure he will do the same for all Malaysians when he is the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. ”

Han Sing Keng
Farmer, 43, Kulai



“ I have seen Sultan Ibrahim in person when he visited a Ramadan bazaar in Pontian where I was selling some traditional food. His Majesty may look stern, but he is actually a friendly person who is approachable and easy-going. I am certain that His Majesty will make Johoreans proud when he is the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. ”

Saedah Nurong
Restaurant owner, 64, Pontian



“ Sultan Ibrahim is very protective over his subjects and will always ensure their needs are well taken care of. His Majesty has no qualms about calling out politicians when they are not doing a good enough job to serve the people. I believe Tuanku will continue to do the same as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. ”

Amirudin Amat
Trader, 47, Muar



“ As a Johorean, I am proud of the appointment of Sultan Ibrahim as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. His Majesty has placed the development of Mersing and Johor as a top priority. May Sultan Ibrahim be able to contribute towards the stability and development of this country. ”

Fahmi Abd Malik
Senior Manager of a resort, 37, Mersing



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**CORONADE
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DAULAT TUANKU

SALUTATIONS & HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS TO



**HIS MAJESTY SULTAN IBRAHIM,
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31st JANUARY 2024 (19th REJAB 1445H)

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Management and Staff



GENTING



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MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS

Eager for Sultan Ibrahim's reign



Alya believes that Sultan Ibrahim will create a trend by popularising the traditional charm of 'Baju Teluk Blangah'.



Muhamad Hariz has high hopes that the country will further progress and prosper during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim.



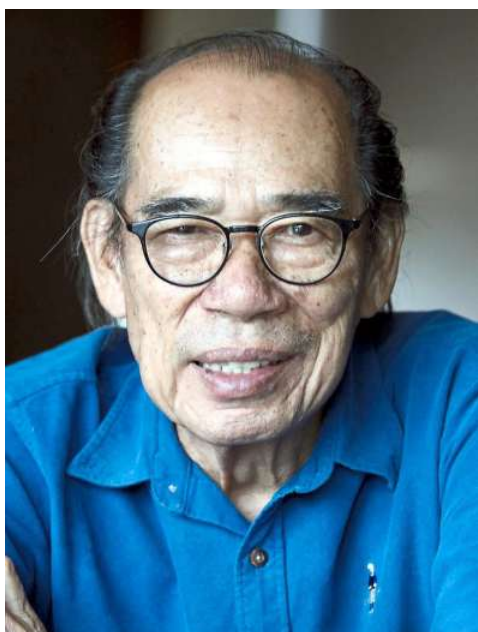
Raja Izmi hopes that the appointment of Sultan Ibrahim as the 17th Agong will bring positive vibes to the country.



Chin wants to see Malaysia record a positive economic growth within the next five years and beyond.



Chan said political stability would send strong signals especially to foreign investors and tourists to continue investing and visiting the country.



Chow said as a nature lover, Sultan Ibrahim can play a role in advising the Government to make more efforts to protect Malaysia's biodiversity.



Usha Devi said Bangsa Johor has high hopes that Sultan Ibrahim will perform well for all Malaysians like what he did in his home state Johor.



Elisha said she was confident that Sultan Ibrahim would use his experience to work closely with the Federal Government to bring Malaysia to the next level.

By **ZAZALI MUSA**
metro@thestar.com.my

JOHOREANS are elated with the appointment of their beloved Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar as the country's 17th Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

The Star interviewed Johoreans on their hopes and expectations during His Majesty's five-year reign as a King.

Alya Nurmaisarah Mohd Nazri said she is happy that Sultan Ibrahim was elected the new King, four decades after his late father Sultan Iskandar Ibni Almarhum Sultan Ismail took office from 1984 to 1989.

"Hopefully, I will be able to watch the live coronation of our Sultan as the new King on television," said the 23-year-old boutique assistant.

Alya also hoped Sultan Ibrahim could consider repeating the success story of Kembara Mahkota Johor held in the state by having Kembara Mahkota Agong to get to know his subjects better.

She also believed that Sultan Ibrahim will create a trend by popularising the traditional charm of "Baju Teluk Blangah" which is synonymous in Johor among Malaysians in other states.

Entrepreneur Muhamad Hariz Abdul Rahim, 30, has high hopes that the country will further progress and prosper during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim as the new King.

"I believe Sultan Ibrahim will play a greater role in his capacity as the King to ensure Malaysia's stability and the well-being of the rakyat," he said.

Hariz said political stability at the Federal level would bring positive impacts to the country in terms of attracting more foreign investors into Malaysia.

He said Sultan Ibrahim could implement the concept of Bangsa Johor as a tool to unite Malaysians from different ethnicities and religions as one "Bangsa Malaysia".

Retiree Raja Izmi Raja Jaafar hoped that the appointment of Sultan Ibrahim as the 17th King will bring positive vibes to the country.

"The ordinary people have had enough of politicking in recent years and it is time for us to move forward instead of going backward," he said.

The 62-year-old Raja Izmi agreed with Sultan Ibrahim in his interview with the media that his role was to take care of 33 million Malaysians and not the 222 Members of Parliament.

He said that although the King should remain apolitical, His Majesty's wisdom is needed to advise the Prime Minister on matters related to the nation's interests.

Electrical store manager Jenny Chin, 36, wanted to see Malaysia record a positive economic growth within the next five years and beyond.

"The focus should be on strengthening the economy and not personal interest of

certain individuals like what is happening now," she said.

Chin said, like all Johoreans, she was looking forward to the role played by Tunku Mahkota Johor Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim as the Regent in the absence of his father Sultan Ibrahim as King.

She hoped that Johor's close relationship with its closest neighbour Singapore will continue to flourish under the reign of Tunku Ismail as the Acting Johor Ruler.

Kelvin Chang Swee Meng said Sultan Ibrahim's statements on His Majesty sharing a close relationship with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is a good indicator.

"The Palace and the Executive need to work together for the good of the nation," said the 48-year-old IT and Security Services director.

Chang said political stability would send strong signals especially to foreign investors and tourists to continue investing and visiting the country.

He was also confident that the Acting Johor Ruler Tunku Mahkota Johor Tunku Ismail has what it takes to rule Johor when his father Sultan Ibrahim took office at Istana Negara.

Malaysian Nature Society president Vincent Chow, 78, said as a nature lover, Sultan Ibrahim can play a role in advising the Government to make more efforts to protect Malaysia's biodiversity.

"We are one of the top 12 countries rich

in biodiversity in the world and we need to maintain that position," he said.

Chow said the country's rich biodiversity could become the product to promote agro-tourism activities and will create economic spillover to the tourism and hospitality sector.

He added Sultan Ibrahim always championed education and on this note could encourage more youths to take on modern farming to ensure food safety and security for the country.

Usha Devi Chellapan said Bangsa Johor has high hopes that Sultan Ibrahim will perform well for all Malaysians like what he did in his home state Johor.

The 62-year-old nurse recalled at a Thaipusam event held at a temple in Johor Baru in 2018, at that time Sultan Ibrahim wore an arm sling.

"Although His Majesty wore an arm sling, he still shook hands with his subjects including me and my husband," she said.

Environmental activities coordinator Elisha Indhumathi, 53, described Sultan Ibrahim as "a person with a global view thinking" which is good for the country.

"From time to time, as the Johor Ruler, His Majesty always keeps on emphasising how important it is for Johor to progress and develop," she said.

Elisha said she was confident that Sultan Ibrahim would use his experience to work closely with the Federal Government to bring Malaysia to the next level.



DAULAT TUANKU

SALUTATIONS & HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS TO



**HIS MAJESTY SULTAN IBRAHIM,
KING OF MALAYSIA**

&

**HER MAJESTY RAJA ZARITH SOFIAH,
QUEEN OF MALAYSIA**

31st JANUARY 2024 (19th REJAB 1445H)

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Sultan's kindness rebuilds homes



Zawiyah and Meriam's house in Kampung Gajah Mati in Mersing that was engulfed in a fire. (Right) Zawiyah and her mother Meriam receiving a mock key for their new house. — Photos by the Royal Press Office



The house brothers Lai Ho and Liang Siang used to live in before getting a new home from the Johor Sultan. (Right) Lai Ho and Liang Siang (left) in front of their new house in Kampung Perigi Acheh, Masai. — Photos by the Royal Press Office



By **VENESA DEVI**
venesa@thestar.com.my

AFTER waiting for close to two decades, S. Poongkodi's wish of returning to her own house in Kulai was finally fulfilled, thanks to the generosity of Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar.

The mother of two said that she moved out of the house with her two children after the death of her husband in 2006.

"My husband was on his way to work in Pasir Gudang when he met with an accident that took his life.

"Since then, me and my two children moved into my mother's house as we could not bear the pain of losing him.

"We left our old house in Jalan Kelapa Sawit, and over time, the house's condition got worse. I was unable to fix it as I kept whatever little money I earned for my children's education.

"We have been dreaming of returning to the house for many years, and finally our dream came true, thanks to Sultan Ibrahim," she said.

Poongkodi, 55, who works as a van driver, said that she could not find the words to express her gratitude to Sultan Ibrahim for rebuilding the house that meant so much to her family.

"I'm very grateful to Sultan

Ibrahim for the kindness bestowed upon us. I will remember His Majesty's kindness for the rest of my life," she said, adding that she is also grateful to volunteers from Yayasan Sultan Ibrahim Johor (YSIJ) for their assistance.

Poongkodi, who received the keys to her new house about a year ago, was just one of dozens whose lives were changed by the kind gesture of Sultan Ibrahim through YSIJ.

Also touched by the Johor Sultan's generosity was Juraimi Palai, 55, whose plan to build his own house was previously dashed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"After living in a rented house for many years, I was able to save up some money and put my plan of building my own home into motion in 2019.

"Unfortunately, my dream never even got close to being realised as construction had to be stopped not long after it started due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"At that point, the house was still at the very early stage of construction, and only the pillars had been put up," he said.

Juraimi, who has been running a business selling pelita (oil lamps) since 2016, said that he was unable to continue his mission after that due to financial constraints.



Poongkodi receiving a mock key from YSIJ coordinator Mejar Cina Datuk David Wong for her house at Jalan Kelapa Sawit in Kulai. — Photo by the Royal Press Office

"The pandemic had significantly affected my business, making it impossible for me to continue where I left off with regards to the construction of the house.

"However, the dream later miraculously turned into reality when Sultan Ibrahim gave me a new house," he said.

Meanwhile, brothers Tan Lai Ho and Tan Liang Siang, from Kampung Perigi Acheh, Masai, have been able to live in a comfortable house since November 2021 after years of facing leaking roofs, thanks to Sultan Ibrahim.

Lai Ho, 65, said he could not believe they could one day feel

what it is like to live in a comfortable house with no leaking roofs.

"Finally, we are now able to live in a comfortable three-bedroom house with roofs that do not leak when it rains.

"I'm very thankful to His Majesty for being so caring to the lives of us senior citizens. I am grateful that we Johoreans have a Sultan whose heart is always close to the people regardless of race or religion," said Lai Ho, who works as a helper at a Chinese temple.

He said that his brother, who is 67 years old, used to work as a fisherman before losing vision in

both eyes due to glaucoma.

Through the YSIJ, Sultan Ibrahim has also given light to the lives of many who lost their homes due to disasters such as fire and storms.

Among them were 87-year-old Meriam Yakob and her 56-year-old daughter, Zawiyah Ripin, who received a new house from His Majesty less than two months after their home in Kampung Gajah Mati in Mersing was engulfed in a fire in May 2022.

"We are very grateful and honoured that the Johor Sultan was willing to show such kindness to us mother and daughter.

"What makes it even more amazing is that they are able to give us this new house in less than two months after we lost our house," said Zawiyah.

Preschool assistant Nora Md Nor, 40, said that she did not believe her ears when told that the Sultan of Johor would help to rebuild her house that was damaged in a storm in Kampung Sungai Bunyi, Pontian.

"I could not believe it when I first heard the news. I am very grateful and touched by His Majesty's willingness to help us.

"I have no other words to say but thank you," said Nora, one of 15 families from the village whose homes were also rebuilt by YSIJ after they were destroyed in the storm.



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&

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SERI PADUKA BAGINDA RAJA PERMAISURI AGONG,
RAJA ZARITH SOFIAH BINTI ALMARHUM SULTAN IDRIS SHAH

31 JANUARI 2024 (19 REJAB 1445H)

Sembah Takzim Daripada:

Tan Sri Dato' Sri Leong Hoy Kum (Pengasas dan Pengarah Urusan Kumpulan)
Ahli Lembaga Pengarah
Pengurusan dan Kakitangan

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31st JANUARY 2024 (19th REJAB 1445H)

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Eco-friendly and sustainable living

By ZAZALI MUSA
metro@thestar.com.my

MAH Sing Group Bhd (Mah Sing) reaffirms its commitment to the Johor market, where its journey began 24 years ago with the launch of its first township in 2000.

The Group introduced the concept of gated and guarded living for link homes in Sri Pulai Perdana, Skudai, Johor Baru.

“This innovative approach was unheard of in Iskandar Malaysia,” said Mah Sing’s founder and managing director Tan Sri Leong Hoy Kum.

He said subsequently, Mah Sing expanded its footprint in Johor with strategic developments, including the launch of its industrial park named i-Parc in 2014, followed by its largest township, Meridin East in Johor Baru spanning 1,313 acres in 2016.

Leong added Mah Sing’s commitment to diversification and growth led to its foray into the hospitality sector in 2019 with the opening of Ramada by Wyndham in Johor Baru.

He described the venture into hospitality as a testament to Mah Sing’s ability to adapt to changing market dynamics and confidence in exploring new avenues.

The Group recently launched its new sales gallery, M Minori in Taman Austin Perdana, Johor Baru in November 2023.

“The Group’s M Series is known to be affordably priced, strategically located with excellent amenities and infrastructure.”

This sets a new milestone for Mah Sing as it is the first M Series development in the southern region.

The Group’s M Series is known to be affordably priced, strategically located with excellent amenities and infrastructure without compromising on quality.

“This is truly a testament to the company’s dedication to meeting the evolving needs of the market,” said Leong.

Affordably priced starting from RM288,000, M Minori prioritises environmentally friendly and sustainable living as evidenced through its GreenRe Bronze certification.

In addition, M Minori is equipped with green features such as EV (charging stations, rainwater harvesting, automated waste collection system and biodegradable building materials.

“Mah Sing maintains a positive outlook on the Johor property market, attributing its confidence to the Group’s robust brand presence and recognition in the area,” he said.

Apart from that Leong said, the spill-over demand from neighbouring Singapore coupled with upcoming infrastructure projects like the Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link is expected to enhance economic activities in Johor Baru.

He said adding on to that, the recent signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to develop the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (SEZ) between Malaysia and Singapore is anticipated to stimulate economic activities, attracting more residents and investors to Johor.

“Moving forward, Mah Sing is set to strengthen its presence in Johor with more land acquisitions to develop residential, industrial and M Series projects,” said Leong.

He said the Group remains steadfast in its commitment to delivering innovative, quality and value-for-money developments that contribute to the growth and prosperity of Johor.



Leong says the Group remains steadfast in its commitment to delivering innovative, quality and value-for-money developments





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31 JANUARI 2024 (19 REJAB 1445H)

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Malpakat Group Sdn Bhd (221078-M)



Holiday Villa Johor Bahru City Centre



The popular Foon Yew Laksa stall serves piping hot curry noodles with more than 50 types of yong tau fu and other stuffed vegetables to choose from. They also amassed a large multi-racial following over the years since moving to Stulang Walk about a decade ago. — THOMAS YONG/The Star



Norshazlin Abdullah (right) tending to her customers at her stall in Stulang Walk, which sells more than 30 types of snacks from pisang goreng, keropok lekor and spring rolls to nasi lemak and fried mee-hoon. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

Eateries thrive with Sultan's support

By YEE XIANG YUN
xiangyun@thestar.com.my

FOR years, these food and beverage businesses operated at humble roadside stalls until one day, Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar decided to build them proper facilities in Stulang to continue serving the dishes in a better environment.

Norshazlin Abdullah, who occupies one of the five stalls along Stulang Walk in Johor Baru, said her father started selling banana fritters near a power substation near Serene Park more than 30 years ago.

Back then, his stall was a makeshift one and customers used to park by the road to purchase the fried snacks, said the 44-year-old in an interview.

"Things took a turn one day some 12 years ago when three of Sultan Ibrahim's officers visited the stall and told my father that His Majesty had granted him an audience at Istana Pasir Pelangi.

"During the audience, the Ruler had asked if my father wanted to relocate to a new location with better facilities. Of course he agreed," she said.

Norshazlin said the Sultan and other members of the Johor royal family often stopped by their stall to purchase the snacks such as fried bananas with sambal kicap – the Johor way of eating the fritters with spicy soy sauce dip.

"Even when the stall was hot and crowded, the royal family was always friendly towards us and others. It was like there was no gap between us.

"We moved to Stulang Walk about 10 years ago and it was a more comfortable place for us to run the family business," she said, adding that they sell more than 30 types of snacks from pisang goreng,

keropok lekor and spring rolls to nasi lemak and fried mee-hoon.

Stulang Walk, located next to Istana Pasir Pelangi, has five concrete stalls, each with space for tables and chairs for customers to enjoy their food and drinks. Parking bays are also available.

The stalls, managed and maintained by the Johor Baru City Council (MBJB), are operated by a mix of Malay, Chinese and Indian businesses.

"Stulang Walk also reflects the Bangsa Johor concept and Tuanku's vision for the people in the state to live in unity and harmony," added Norshazlin.

Two doors adjacent to her is the popular Foon Yew Laksa stall, which serves piping hot curry noodles with more than 50 types of yong tau fu and other stuffed vegetables to choose from.

Ng Jing Ng (sic), the 36-year-old second generation owner, said it was a blessing to continue the family business at a lot built by Sultan Ibrahim.

The business was actually started by his aunt, where she sold laksa at the canteen of Foon Yew High School back in 1976 until 2003 before moving out of the school grounds.

"After that, she ran a humble stall in Stulang and subsequently in Jalan Pandan before the opportunity came for the business to be relocated to Stulang Walk about a decade ago," he said.

Ng said the condition for the move was that they were not allowed to sell pork dishes, a term that his family had no qualms with as they used only chicken and seafood for their dishes.

He recounted a memorable incident shortly after they moved into the stall: "Sultan Ibrahim arrived unannounced one day and all our customers immediate-

ly stood up as a sign of respect at the sight of His Majesty.

"To our surprise, Tuanku asked our customers, some of whom were quite elderly, to sit down and continue eating as he only wanted to check on the condition of the stalls.

"Tuanku then proceeded to ask us how we were doing. We highlighted to Tuanku that there were no toilets at Stulang Walk so we often had to walk home, which was a few hundred metres away to answer nature's call," Ng said.

According to him, the Sultan promised them they would have proper toilets in a month's time and true enough, MBJB built a toilet at each of the five stalls to provide convenience to the workers and customers.

"We remain thankful until today for the Sultan's concern for his people. He did not have to take it upon himself to do these things but he did them anyway. At first we were also worried that business would be slow at the new location but thanks to a social media posting of Tunku Mahkota Johor Tunku Ismail and his family's visit to our stall, business started to boom.

"Our customer base became more diverse and business has now increased by some 70% compared to before," he said, adding that they could sell 300 to 400 bowls of laksa daily and more on week-ends.

Ng now runs the stall with the help of 10 family members and employees.

"My siblings and I started helping our aunt since we were in primary school and that was where we learned her ways and recipes. We have kept her laksa and sambal recipes in the family and I personally blend the ingredients to cook them myself each day to keep it as authentic as

possible," he added.

Meanwhile, P. Kannan, who serves south Indian dishes at another stall, said his was one of the newest additions to Stulang Walk having just opened a year ago.

The 47-year-old said he jumped at the chance to take up one of the lots there when offered by one of the Ruler's officers after trying out some dishes at his restaurant in Perling.

"It was an offer that I could not pass up and I aim to continue serving delicious meals that cost RM10 and below to provide people with wallet-friendly options.

"Our popular dishes are the chicken varuval, keera curry and nasi briyani. We mostly use spices from India that we blend using our own recipe," said the businessman.

He noted that his stall opens from as early as 6am to cater to those working in Singapore as well as residents staying in the Stulang area.

He added he was excited over the fact that Sultan Ibrahim has been sworn-in as the 17th Yang di-Pertuan Agong, which has also been a hot topic among his customers over the past few weeks.

"As a Johorean, I fully understood how they felt and now other Malaysians will get the chance to enjoy His Majesty's reign as he has done so much for the people in this state.

"I have been keeping up-to-date with his news on social media and I wish him all the best as the new King," he said.

Unlike Norshazlin and Ng, Kannan said he has not had the opportunity to meet Sultan Ibrahim in person yet.

"My dream is to serve Tuanku some of my dishes one day, it would be a big honour for me."



Located next to Istana Pasir Pelangi, Stulang Walk, has five concrete stalls, each with space for tables and chairs for customers to enjoy their food and drinks. Parking bays are also available. The stalls, managed and maintained by the Johor Baru City Council (MBJB), are operated by a mix of Malay, Chinese and Indian businesses.



P. Kannan's workers helping to serve up south Indian dishes at his stall in Stulang Walk. — THOMAS YONG/The Star



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Avago Technologies (M) Sdn. Bhd. (Broadcom)
Sanmina-SCI Systems (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd.**

**PLEXUS Malaysia
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First Solar Malaysia Sdn. Bhd.
Benchmark Precision Technologies
JHM Consolidation Berhad
KYOCERA AVX Components (Penang) Sdn. Bhd.
IME Technology Sdn. Bhd.
TTVISION Holdings Berhad

HP Malaysia Manufacturing Sdn. Bhd.
Celestica Malaysia Sdn. Bhd.
Keysight Technologies
Bioenergy Projects Sdn. Bhd.
RPD MFG Connectivity Sdn. Bhd.
Deloitte Tax Services Sdn. Bhd.
Pentamaster Corporation Berhad
Swift Bridge Technologies (M) Sdn. Bhd.
Shan Poornam Group of Companies

Smart initiatives shape Greater JB

By REMAR NORDIN

remar.nordin@thestar.com.my

IN 2024, the Greater Johor Baru (Greater JB) agenda is set to make significant progress in improving residents' services.

The four local councils – Johor Baru City Council, Iskandar Puteri City Council, Pasir Gudang City Council, and Kulai Municipal Council – are working together to make this vision a reality.

These councils are focused on enhancing community development in the Greater JB area through collaborative efforts and utilising each council's strengths.

The agenda involves various initiatives and strategies to boost the quality of life, attract investments, and position JB as a key economic player.

Johor Baru mayor Datuk Mohd Noorazam Osman said that the city council has adopted digital technology, like the One Stop Centre (OCS) 3.0 app, to make things easier, especially when dealing with applications for planning permission and licences.

"It has the Johor Fast Lane feature that streamlines processes for investors, making it simpler for them to get approvals for planning, building plans, Certificates of Completion and Compliance (CCC), and operating licences.

"They've also made licence applications easier with a date-to-date method, helping business owners and the local authorities," he said.

The council also plans to launch the e-merit system this year that will grade food premises and public and private toilets, allowing the public to easily check how clean these places are, he added.

To spread the idea of Greater JB, the four local councils have teamed up with the Johor Professional Association (DECCO) to create guidelines and policies for the benefit of the local authorities and the industry, he informed.

"MBJB has recently received recognition as a 'Smart City Early Adopter' and got a grant of RM200,000 from the Housing and Local Government Ministry (KPKT) to start the Smart City project.

"The next step is to make sure that the three other local councils under Greater JB also get recognised for developing smart cities.

"This will benefit almost half of Johor's population in Greater JB by providing faster and more efficient services using technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and sensors for early warnings during disasters," he said.

The installation of 2,000 AI-powered closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) throughout the Greater JB area has been done in phases starting in 2023, which will make the city safer and boost confidence among investors, he said.

Noorazam also informed that the MBJB launched the Johor Baru Integrated Operations Control Centre (JBIOCC) in December last year to improve city monitoring.

"After three months, JBIOCC has provided 108 AI-equipped



Pasir Gudang City Council (MBPG) mayor Datuk Asman Shah Abd Rahman.



Johor Baru City Council (MBJB) mayor Datuk Mohd Noorazam Osman.



Iskandar Puteri City Council (MBIP) mayor Datuk Mohd Haffiz Ahmad.



Kulai Municipal Council (MPKu) president Mohd Fahmi Salam.



The year 2024 will see the Greater JB agenda take a significant leap forward, bringing streamlined services to residents. The agenda includes various initiatives and strategies to enhance quality of life, attract investments, and position JB as a key economic player.

CCTV cameras and a Smart Integrated Operations Centre (SIOC) in Phase 1.

"Future plans include adding 500 CCTV cameras, five variable message signs (VMS), and 10 emergency buttons around Johor Baru, which are expected to be fully operational by April this year," he said.

JBIOCC helps MBJB identify issues like damaged infrastructure and supports enforcement tasks, such as dealing with improper parking, vandalism, and illegal waste disposal.

As for Pasir Gudang City Council, mayor Datuk Asman Shah Abd Rahman shared that the council has set aside RM20mil for the establishment of a brand new crocodile park in Kong Kong.

He added that the park will serve as the main tourism attraction in Pasir Gudang and will be curated by reptile experts from the Singapore Zoo.

Spanning over an area of 8.09ha, the new park will replace the existing 3.23ha Pasir Gudang Estuarine Crocodile Sanctuary in Tanjung Langsat, which was established in 2009.

Asman Shah stated that the project will be carried out in phases for 24 months, with development expected to commence in the first quarter of this year.

"Pasir Gudang has several other major developments planned for this year, including the Tunku Mahkota Ismail Youth Centre (TMIYC) and Dataran Mahkota, situated near the Pasir Gudang Indoor Stadium.

"The TMIYC Pasir Gudang is currently 46% complete and is projected to be finished by the

end of this year," he informed.

Asman Shah also revealed that a new MBPG office building in Kong Kong is currently 18% complete and is scheduled to be fully operational by December 2025.

The 15-storey building will feature an office block, a multi-purpose hall, and underground parking.

"We are also anticipating the commencement of a thermal waste treatment plant burning system in Tanjung Langsat, which is set to begin this year.

"The technical meeting with the developers will be held early this year, and the project is expected to be completed within 24 to 36 months," he said.

Meanwhile, he informed that the council is planning to relocate petty traders from their roadside stalls to the Kebayan food court to provide a safer and more suitable environment for them.

"Local councillors have been instructed to meet with the petty traders in their respective areas to determine the most appropriate Kebayan for them to ensure they maintain their customer base after the relocation," he added.

MBPG also plans to install smart traffic lights at all 33 intersections in the city this year to alleviate traffic congestion besides installing 5,388 solar lights in residential areas and 1,000 LED lights on the protocol road.

"We also hope that the public will support the new assessment tax, as it will enable the city to introduce more development projects," he said, adding that the assessment tax has not been

updated for over a decade.

Meanwhile, Iskandar Puteri City Council, under the leadership of mayor Datuk Mohd Haffiz Ahmad, has outlined a comprehensive plan to improve the city's infrastructure and promote sustainability.

"As part of the MBIP Strategic Plan 2026, the council aims to install 530 AI-equipped CCTVs throughout the city this year. The CCTVs will be complemented by the introduction of smart traffic lights, lighting systems, and parking facilities," he said.

All the footage and amenities will be monitored through the council's Integrated Operation Command Centre, which is connected to the other three local councils under Greater JB, he added.

In addition to these technological advancements, the council has also embraced green energy initiatives by incorporating four electric vehicles into its operations and is planning to rent electric motorcycles this year.

"MBIP also aims to organise more low-carbon programmes as part of the Iskandar Puteri Low Carbon Society Action Plan 2025; the council is offering financial support ranging from RM10,000 to RM30,000 for any green initiative programme conducted by the community.

"We have gradually replaced conventional lights with LED lights for street lights and lighting systems in existing housing projects. Additionally, we plan to enhance road conditions, provide more public amenities, and introduce additional public sports areas.

"Some of the upcoming

projects include the Mini Stadium in Medini, Gym Rakyat at the TMIYC Iskandar Puteri, a hawker centre, and two community hubs in Taman Bukit Indah and Taman Impian Emas," he added.

He also shared that their highlight for this year is the transformation of Kampung Sungai Melayu into an eco-tourism centre.

"The council plans to upgrade the jetty and provide more parking space for visitors. This project is expected to be completed in June, further enhancing the city's appeal and promoting sustainable tourism," he said.

As for Kulai Municipal Council (MPKu) president Mohd Fahmi Salam, the inclusion of MPKu into the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JSEZ) is warmly welcomed.

"This development will bring about comprehensive changes to the development landscape in the MPKu area, rather than focusing on just one specific area.

"The economic spillover in the industrial sector will be significant, and efforts are being made to empower other sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and entrepreneurship in collaboration with relevant agencies.

"Given its strategic location and natural resources, these three sectors are expected to be major contributors to the economy in Kulai.

"The recent expansion of Senai International Airport has also enhanced the capacity to support these efforts, with the airport now able to accommodate five million passengers per year compared to the previous four million," he said.

In addition to the industrial sector, Mohd Fahmi shared that MPKu is also prioritising the development of smart cities and green cities.

"These include the Kulai Fast Lane e-licence initiative, the upgrading of smart traffic lights, the installation of 300 AI-CCTVs over the next five years, the adoption of electric vehicles, solar installations on MPKu premises, and the planning of a smart parking app," he said.

Mohd Fahmi added that the council will also focus on the well-being of the people, including efforts to mitigate flood-risk areas and improve the road network system in the area.

"The development strategies will be based on the preparation of the MPKu 2035 local plan, which is planned to be finalised by September 2024," he said.



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Board of Directors, Senior Management & Employees of KPJ Healthcare



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Celebrating diversity with Chingay



In 2016, Sultan Ibrahim showed his signature 'love' symbol when attending the Johor Chingay procession as the Johor Ruler, 10 years since he first graced the event as the Tunku Mahkota Johor (Johor crown prince). With him was then Johor tourism, domestic trade and consumerism committee chairman Datuk Tee Siew Kiong.



Ho looking at the photos of Sultan Ibrahim at the annual Johor Chingay procession over the years before His Majesty was appointed the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. The photos are displayed at the association's building in Taman Sri Tebrau, Johor Baru.



At the Johor Chingay procession in 2016, Sultan Ibrahim was presented with a photo of himself when he attended the event 10 years prior as the Tunku Mahkota Johor (Johor crown prince). With him are then Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong (far right), then Johor tourism, domestic trade and consumerism committee chairman Datuk Tee Siew Kiong (second from right), then Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Mohamed Khaled Nordin (behind), and former Johor Baru Tiong-Hua Association president Datuk Seri Tey Kim Chai (far left).



Sultan Ibrahim unveiling a Chinese calligraphy artwork that was presented to him as a gift during the Johor Chingay procession in 2018.

By YEE XIANG YUN
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SULTAN Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar's presence always added another dimension to the annual Chingay procession, said the Johor Baru Tiong-Hua Association.

The association, which has affiliations with about 80 Chinese non-governmental organisations in the state, is the main organiser of the annual Chingay Festival that falls on the 18th to 22nd day of the lunar new year.

Its president Ho Sow Tong said before Sultan Ibrahim became the 17th Yang di-Pertuan Agong, he attended the festival's climatic event – the Chingay procession – four times in total.

"Tuanku graced our event in 2016, 2017, 2018 and also once when he was the Tunku Mahkota Johor or crown prince in 2006. He usually stayed for about an hour to enjoy the cultural performances from the main stage located in front of the Komtar JBCC shopping mall, he said.

"We believe that the Sultan's presence attracted even more people to participate and watch the iconic event, which is also

included in Johor's tourism calendar.

"It also paved the way for people of other races to learn more about the Chinese culture," he told *The Star* in an interview.

The Chingay procession, which is the climatic event of the five-day festival, is a Chinese New Year staple for the state's Chinese community.

It is also the only time of the year where each of the deities from the five main Chinese dialect clans – Hokkien, Teochew, Hakka, Cantonese and Hainan – were brought out of the Johor Ancient Temple for a tour of the Johor Baru city centre.

Ho said that each year, hundreds of thousands of participants and spectators – both from Malaysia and overseas – turned up for the procession.

The festival was scaled down greatly for three years during the Covid-19 pandemic to curb the spread of the virus, said Ho, adding that it returned to its glory in 2023 and some 300,000 people showed up to participate and watch the procession.

"There is also a common saying among the community that the Chingay Festival marks the

end of the Chinese New Year celebrations.

This year's Chingay Festival begins on the night of Feb 27 until March 2, with the procession taking place on March 1.

Ho said the fact that His Majesty was willing to attend the procession in the past meant a lot to the community and showed that he is welcoming and accepting of other cultures and beliefs.

"Aside from promoting the Bangsa Johor spirit of moderation, unity and harmony, Sultan Ibrahim is always quick to quash controversies especially when it touches on sensitive issues.

"This includes the 2017 incident where he ordered a self-operating launderette in Muar to immediately stop its discriminatory practice of only allowing Muslims to use its facilities, or risk being shut down by the Ruler himself.

"We need more leaders like His Majesty as Malaysia is a multi-racial society which calls for more understanding among the people," he added.

"In 2021, Sultan Ibrahim also decreed that the Chinese community were not 'pendatang' (immigrants) but 'guests' invited to

Johor by his forefathers to help develop the state. This was an important statement to make," he said.

The Ruler reportedly made the statement to mark that year's lunar celebration where he expressed appreciation for the Chinese community's contribution in developing the state since the beginning of the Johor Sultanate in the 16th century.

Ho, who is the 12th president of the association, said that the Johor royal family and the Chinese community have long shared close ties.

It has been reported that the Chinese had come to Johor to trade during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties and by 1844, Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim had invited planters from China to plant gambier and pepper in the interior of the state.

Sultan Ibrahim reportedly said pepper and gambier were vital to the state's economy in the 1800s with Europe as a major market.

The palace understood the skills and expertise in transforming Johor's economy and even taking in the world market; this resulted in the special relation-

ship between the Chinese and the palace, Tuanku reportedly said in 2021.

Later, Sultan Abu Bakar continued the goodwill started by Temenggong Ibrahim by providing the Chinese land to build their places of worship and for their burial.

In the late 19th century, a group of community leaders led by prominent figure Tan Hiok Nee built the Johor Ancient Temple at Jalan Trus. He was subsequently appointed Mejar Cina (Chinese Major) and made a member of Sultan Abu Bakar's state council in 1868.

As a symbol of appreciation, prominent Johor entrepreneur Wong Ah Fook and Kapitan China Seah Thye Heng built the Chinese Hall (Dewan Cina) at the Istana Besar as a gift to Sultan Abu Bakar.

The building, located next to the Sultan Abu Bakar royal museum, still stands on the palace grounds today.

With Sultan Ibrahim starting his new journey as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on Jan 31, Ho said he represented the community in Johor to wish him the best in his five-year reign.



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**YAB Dato' Sri Haji Wan Rosdy Bin Wan Ismail
Menteri Besar Pahang**

**Pahang State Government and
People of Pahang Darul Makmur**



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Ling (centre) and Johor unity ambassadors helping out during a community 'kenduri' cook-out programme. (Right) Ling trying his hand at making the thosai, a popular Indian dish, during a programme in Johor Baru recently. — THOMAS YONG/The Star



Bringing unity to the fore

By YEE XIANG YUN

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JOHOR Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar's appointment as the new Yang di-Pertuan Agong could help to cool the political temperature in the country.

Johor health and unity committee chairman Ling Tian Soon said the Sultan's decrees have always been moderate and widely accepted not only by Johoreans but also people in other parts of Malaysia.

"The rakyat is looking forward to a more stable and harmonious country with Sultan Ibrahim as the 17th Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

"I hope that those who like to touch on the 3R (race, religion and royalty) topics will refrain from stirring up such issues after this," he said.

Ling, who is Yong Peng assemblyman, noted that Tuanku as the Ruler of Johor frequently attended festive celebrations of the Chinese and Indian communities, which shows that he accepts the different cultures and beliefs of the people.

"I believe that Tuanku will bring the Bangsa Johor spirit, which emphasises unity, peace and moderation, to the national level," he said.

The MCA Youth chief also believes that

the new King could play a significant role in "putting out the fire" before it spreads.

"It has become the people's habit to link everything and anything to race and religion these days. In the past, whenever racial or controversial issues arose in Johor, Sultan Ibrahim would be quick to respond or provide his views.

"This has helped to cool temperatures and prevent the issue from spinning out of control," he said, adding that the Ruler is well equipped and experienced to handle such issues on the national level.

Taking cue from the Ruler, Ling said the state government has allocated RM7.3mil since 2018 to promote unity and foster better ties among the people.

He added that unity was part of the state government's Maju Johor agenda, outlined under Strategy Four: Fostering Unity among the Bangsa Johor people, which is a term used to address those living in the state.

"The agenda was also in line with the Johor Development Master Plan 2030 which puts forth the element of unity. Among our objectives are to focus on the social, unity and harmony aspects of the people," he said.

As such, programmes conducted included the Unity Ambassador programme and the cross-cultural dance programme

where school students were encouraged to combine dances from different cultures into a performance.

"While continuing the ongoing programmes this year, we are planning to expand the cross-cultural dance programme to vernacular schools to get more young people involved," he said.

In efforts to further promote unity, Ling said he plans to launch the "Port Perpaduan" or unity spots initiative soon to recognise food and beverage outlets that carry unity elements.

"We have many coffee shops and eateries that are frequented by people from various walks of life. Some were even patronised by the Johor royal family.

"As a start, we will choose two of such shops in each of Johor's 10 districts and name them Port Perpaduan that serve food and drinks that everybody can consume," added Ling.

Apart from that, he said the state Unity and Integrity Department also introduced an aqua-farming project involving Rukun Tetangga (KRT) communities.

He said the department worked with local councils to allow residential communities to run aquaponic farming activities on unused plots of land.

"So far, 54 locations are involved in the project where they produce vegetables

such as lady's fingers, mustard greens and long beans, as well as fish for the consumption of the surrounding community.

"The produce is sold lower than market price to strengthen food security while taking care of the people's pockets," he said.

Ling added that the state appointed unity ambassadors were also involved in the aquaponic project and urged them to come up with more fun programmes to bring people together.

Since the Unity Ambassador programme's inception in 2022, two batches of ambassadors from various races and backgrounds have been appointed, he said, adding that they were mostly public and private university students.

"I also hope they can bring forward the unity spirit when they enter the workforce and contribute to national unity in a positive way.

"Apart from the state and federal government's efforts, I call upon the people to stand together and keep in mind that racial unity is our asset and should be cherished.

"Let's not break it by spreading hate or stirring sensitive issues, which will not only threaten our racial harmony but also the country and state's development and growth."



Johor unity ambassadors helping out during a recycling drive as part of their community engagement efforts to foster stronger ties among the people.



Jalan Meranti, Taman Sri Pulai Rukun Tetangga members proudly showing the fresh produce such as mushrooms and fish from their aquaponic project.



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