Star Special

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Installation of Penang Yang di-Pertua Negri

Seasoned leader

Tun Ramli Ngah Talib, an experienced administrator at state and federal levels, is set to bring his vast governmental knowledge to guide Penang as its ninth Yang di-Pertua Negri.

Penang a trove of sweet memories

Newly installed 9th TYT returns to state he holds dear, filled with significant moments

Stories by TAN SIN CHOW and IVAN LOH
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(From left) Ramli, Raja Noora Ashikin sharing a light moment with (from right) Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow and his wife Tan Lean Kee after Ramli's installation as Penang TYT at Dewan Sri Pinang. — Photos: CHAN BOON KAI/The Star

PENANG harbours a store of rosy memories for the ninth Yang di-Pertua Negri Tun Ramli Ngah Talib.

He spent his honeymoon here with Toh Puan Raja Noora Ashikin Raja Abdullah in 1973, staying at the then National Electricity Board (now Tenaga Nasional Berhad) bungalow in Tanjung Bungah.

At the time, Ramli was the board's legal adviser, and before that, he had made history in 1971 by becoming the first in-house legal adviser of the board.

"Penang island was a gem of a resort island then, considered the nearest destination for me.

"More than 50 years ago, there were so few holiday resort destinations in the country.

"Kuala Lumpur was just another city, and Singapore felt too far away.

"It was a memorable experience, something worth looking back on and reflecting upon.

"Perhaps it is fate that brought me back, and this time as the Yang di-Pertua Negri," he said in an interview at Eastern and Oriental Hotel in George Town.

The Penang of Ramli's 1973 honeymoon was nothing like today.

Back then, trishaws and scooters were everywhere and eating out chiefly meant eating hawker food.

In Bayan Lepas, there were just a handful of brand new factories bearing names nobody had ever heard of: Intel, Advanced Micro Devices and Hitachi were among the very few.

Komtar and Penang Bridge were still on the drawing board.

But Ramli said Penang first took his breath away in the 1950s, when he was a teenager.

His brother was a Customs officer in Perai, and Ramli visited Penang island for a short holiday.

"As a teenage boy, it was a wonderful and exciting experience.

"I watched the panorama of the waterfront in George Town as the ferry neared the island.

"It was truly something to behold, with the breeze and smell of the sea greeting me.

"I saw two dolphins swimming alongside our ferry, as if guiding us to the pier. It was magical.

"That moment left an impression on me. It showed how pristine and pure the waters were.

"I was told that sightings of dolphins were common then, both day and night," he said.

In those pre-Independence days, Ramli recalled that Penang Hill was the island's main attraction.

"There wasn't much else back then, and Penang Hill stood out," he said.

On May 1 this year, Ramli, 84, took his oath of office as the ninth Yang di-Pertua Negri of Penang, succeeding Tun Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak.

Ramli (left) sharing his reflections and fond memories of Penang with *The Star's* deputy news editor Tan Sin Chow during the interview at a hotel in George Town.

Just two days before the official installation ceremony at Dewan Sri Pinang, Ramli received an unexpected yet touching surprise – a congratulatory bouquet from long-time friend Datuk Mohamed Sidek Elamdin, whom he had not seen since 1957.

"We last met in 1957, when he was still a school headmaster in Kampung Gajah in Pasir Salak. We lost touch after that," he said.

After that last encounter, Mohamed Sidek came to Penang in 1975 to serve as the senior private secretary to the then Yang di-Pertua Negri, Tun Syed Sheh Hassan Barakbah.

Mohamed Sidek is now living in Penang.

"So a dear friend I had in Perak 72 years ago has now reappeared in my life here in Penang, where I am now serving as the Yang di-Pertua Negri," Ramli added with a smile.

Ramli said he recently invited Mohamed Sidek, who is now 95, for lunch at Yusuf Restaurant in Relau, Penang.

"We reminisced and talked about the good old days. He is very happy.

"His memory is sharp and his mental alertness remains remarkable," he said.

Illustrious political career

Born on March 16, 1941, in Pasir Salak, Ramli demonstrated his leadership prowess as the eighth Perak mentri besar for 17 years from 1982 to 1999, making him the longest-serving chief executive of the state.

His political journey began in 1978 when he was elected Kampung Gajah assemblyman and then appointed a state executive councillor.

After his tenure in the state administration, Ramli went on to the federal level when he was elected as Pasir Salak MP from 1999 to 2008.

In his first term in Parliament in 1999, he was appointed as deputy transport minister.

In 2004, he was entrusted to chair the Public Accounts Committee, a key parliamentary oversight body, before being appointed the Dewan Rakyat Speaker, a post he held until 2008.

Ramli's leadership within Umno was equally significant, chairing the Perak Umno liaison committee for 16 years (1984 to 2000) and being member of the party supreme council from 1980 to 2006.

Harmony in diversity

Ramli said Malaysia, and Penang in particular, stood proudly as a harmonious land in the world.

He said the rights of all ethnic groups were well protected under the Federal Constitution, ensuring that every community had a rightful place in this nation.

"Compared with many other countries, we are second to none, I suppose.

"Individuals from every community understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining our social balance.

"To bring our harmonious atmosphere to a higher level, we must continue to nurture this awareness.

"Harmony grows from a conscious effort, a shared understanding of our nation's values and a respect for the differences that enrich us," he said.

‘State set for another boom era’

Visitors at a jetty in the south of Penang island overlooking the Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah Bridge. Upcoming projects like the Mutiara Line Light Rail Transit (LRT), a proposed third link between the island and mainland and the Penang-Perak water project are expected to bring another era of significant growth in Penang. — Filepic

“I hope to witness the completion of some of these projects during my tenure here. I believe Penang is evolving into a state marked by progress, harmony and opportunities for all.”

Tun Ramli Ngah Talib

WHAT the Yang di-Pertua Negri of Penang saw of the state when he visited back in 1973 is still vivid in his mind.

He still remembers Gurney Drive being lined with vegetable farms, right where the skyscrapers are now.

To Ramli, Penang had been about wide-open spaces, lush greenery, farms and “*kongsi*” houses.

It amazes him to observe the rise of factories and industrial zones, and how Penang has the second highest population density after Kuala Lumpur.

The latest statistics, shared recently by Bayan Baru MP Sim Tze Tzin, show that Bayan Baru in the south of the island has a density of 10,881 inhabitants per sq km, rivalling areas like Cheras in Kuala Lumpur.

Ramli said such development was a natural response to the needs of a growing population and the demands of modern living.

Despite the rapid urbanisation, he stressed that the goal of the state administration must remain the same as it had always been: to create a peaceful, harmonious environment where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life.

With industrialisation comes job creation, and with jobs come opportunities for a better life.

This, in turn, fosters social justice and harmony, he said.

“While achieving work-life balance is important, it must go hand in hand with efforts to reduce poverty and uplift vulnerable communities.

“I believe Penang is heading in the right direction.

It is nearing the ideal balance between development and quality of life.

“From the industrial zones in Bayan Lepas to the Unesco World Heritage Site of George Town, Penang has preserved its unique identity.

“Its rich heritage continues to attract tourists, a reminder of why it is known as the Pearl of the Orient,” he said.

Ramli reminisced about the days when ferries were the primary mode of transport between the island and the mainland, playing a key role in tourism and trade.

He said the construction of Penang Bridge, and the Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah Bridge dramatically improved connectivity but as the state grew, it would need better infrastructure.

With upcoming projects like the Mutiara Line Light Rail Transit (LRT), a proposed third link between the island and mainland and the Penang-Perak water project, Ramli believes Penang is poised for another era of significant growth.

“Good infrastructure attracts investors. Roads, bridges, public transport and a reliable water supply are the foundations of a thriving economy.

“With these in place, we can welcome more investors with confidence and continue to grow.”

“Penang is set for another boom. With a population of about 1.7 million and a rich blend of cultures and talents, the state is set to prosper.

“I hope to witness the completion of some of these projects during my tenure here.

“I believe Penang is evolving into a state marked by progress, harmony and opportunities for all,” he said.

It was earlier reported that construction of the Mutiara Line LRT project would begin in the fourth quarter of 2026, with the target delivery date on Dec 31, 2031.

The 29.5km Mutiara Line will feature 21 strategically located stations and is designed to improve connectivity across Penang island and the mainland.

Its base alignment will link the man-made Silicon Island to both Penang Sentral on the mainland and Komtar in George Town.

On the proposed third link between Gurney Drive on the island and Bagan Ajam on the mainland, it was previously reported that the link would see a change in alignment.

The third link, either in the form of an undersea tunnel or another bridge, and three other road projects are part of the Penang Transport Master Plan.

New TYT ‘a quick decision maker and hands-on person’

TUN Ramli Ngah Talib is a no-nonsense man who always strives towards his objective.

Former Perak executive council member Tan Sri Chang Ko Youn said Ramli, who was Perak mentri besar from 1982 to 1999, was a quick decision maker and also an utterly hands-on person.

“I do believe that he will be able to give good advice and guidance to the Penang government on the path of development.

“With his vast experience in the Perak government, he is fully aware of the powers and limits and how to deal with the Federal government,” he said.

“His appointment will benefit the state government,” he added.

Chang said Ramli might look a bit stern but “he is really a gentle person”.

“He is an approachable man. Deep in his heart, he is soft and accommodative.

Chang: Ramli’s appointment as the Yang di-Pertua Negri is apt, given his vast experience in government.

Lee: Ramli is a capable leader. Perakians are happy to see him as the governor of Penang

“I am proud of him as he is born in Perak,” he said, adding that Ramli was also a prominent lawyer in the 1970s.

Ramli, a former Dewan Rakyat Speaker, is now the ninth Yang di-Pertua Negri of Penang.

He received the instrument of appointment from His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, at Dewan Singgahsana Kecil, Istana Negara, in Kuala Lumpur on April 24.

He was also conferred the Seri Maharaja Mangku Negara award which carries the title “Tun”.

The appointment is effective from May 1 until April 30, 2029.

He succeeds Tun Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak, who has held the post since May 1, 2021.

Chang said Ramli’s appointment as the Yang di-Pertua Negri was apt, given his vast experience in government.

“I served with him in the Perak state government from 1995 to 1999 as a state executive council member.

“If he has made his mind up, he will push ahead.

“He is not the kind of man who likes to beat around the bush,” said Chang who is also the former Jalong assemblyman.

Datuk Lee Chee Leong, another former state exco member, said Ramli was a man of the people.

“He is always concerned about the people’s welfare.

“As a former Speaker (of the Dewan Rakyat) and a deputy minister, he is firm, experienced and knows his job well,” said Lee who had worked with Ramli in the Perak government for two terms.

“Ramli is a capable leader. Perakians are happy to see him as the governor of Penang,” said the former Malim Nawar assemblyman and Kampar MP.

Tun Ramli Ngah Talib (centre) receiving the Darjah Utama Pangkuan Negeri (D.U.P.N), which carries the title of Datuk Seri Utama from Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow (left) during the swearing-in ceremony. — Photos: CHAN BOON KAI/The Star and Buletin Mutiara

Ramli and his consort Toh Puan Raja Noora Ashikin Raja Abdullah at Dewan Sri Penang. Behind them are Chow and his wife Tan Lean Kee.

Ramli, accompanied by his consort, at his installation as Penang's ninth Yang di-Pertua Negri. (Right) Ramli signing the document of his oath of office.

Ramli, Chow and other dignitaries standing at attention for the national anthem at Dewan Sri Pinang.

The guard of honour mounted by the Second Battalion of the Malay Regiment, comprising three officers and 103 soldiers.

Ramli waving to the camera while being escorted to his official car by Chow and other state leaders.

The public checking out the cannons mounted by the army near Dewan Sri Pinang. The cannons fired 17 shots into the air after the ninth Yang di-Pertua Negri was sworn in.

Heartiest Congratulations

HIS EXCELLENCY
TUN DATO' SERI UTAMA HAJI RAMLI BIN NGAH TALIB
ON THE APPOINTMENT AS
THE 9TH YANG DI-PERTUA NEGERI OF THE STATE OF PENANG
ON
1ST MAY 2025 / 3RD ZULKAEDAH 1446H
MAY YOUR EXCELLENCY'S LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO BRING PROSPERITY, HARMONY AND PROGRESS TO THE STATE OF PENANG
WITH SINCEREST REVERENCE FROM

SILICON ISLAND DEVELOPMENT

Water pact a sign of good times for Perak, Penang

Both states will benefit if everything proceeds as planned, says TYT

By TAN SIN CHOW
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AS ONE of the Orang Besar Lapan of Perak, Penang's Yang di-Pertua Negri Tun Ramli Ngah Talib is heartened by the positive tone of the negotiations in the Perak-Penang water deal.

Water is a lifeline for any growing state, and Perak, with its abundant water resources, can support Penang's future needs while providing a new, perpetual revenue stream for Perak coffers, he said.

"I hope this spirit of collaboration continues until the successful completion of the project, which is expected to take about five years.

"If everything proceeds as planned, both states will benefit immensely.

"To me, this deal is more than just an infrastructure project. It represents the kind of inter-state cooperation that is essential for national progress," he said.

Ramli is the Orang Kaya Kaya Seri Agar DiRaja of the Perak sultanate.

He is one of the members of Perak's nobility who were historically the chief aides and advisors of the sultan.

Today, these noblemen hold traditional and ceremonial roles in the governance and culture of the Perak sultanate.

After more than 10 years of negotiations, it was recently reported that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said planning for the project to channel raw water from Sungai Perak to Bukit Merah Dam – partly to support Perak's Kerian Integrated Green Industrial Park and supply treated water to Penang, was now in its final stages.

> **"I hope this spirit of collaboration continues until the successful completion of the project, which is expected to take about five years."**
>
> Tun Ramli Ngah Talib

Late last month, Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said the state government was awaiting a letter from the Perak government to initiate negotiations on the tariff, volume of water to be channelled to Penang, terms, duration of the concession and other related matters.

Plans are being worked out to channel water from Sungai Perak into Bukit Merah Dam to increase its volume for Perak to sell treated water to Penang. — FIlepic

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