

## **Monarchy Interactions in the International Political System: A Case Study of Royal Interactions between Kelantan and Thailand, 1979-2010**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the role of the monarchy institution by focussing on the Kelantan monarchy institution, especially during the reign of the Al-Marhum Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Tuanku Ismail Petra (1979-2010), which had shown noteworthy contributions in strengthening bilateral relation between two monarch families of Kelantan and Thailand. The study endeavours to analyse why the relations of these two monarch families are intimate, and how they are able to sustain their mutual interactions which benefits both royal institutions? In answering these two important questions, the study divides the scope of discussion into three main points. Firstly, it attempts to locate the position of the monarch institution in the international political system vis-à-vis the prevailing modern state system of government nowadays. Secondly, it explores the early interactions of the Kelantan and Thailand monarchs which sets the bedrock of the present relations. Thirdly, it assesses the role of Al-Marhum Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Ismail Petra as the main focus of the study, to sustain the relations with the Thai royals, and concurrently has benefitted both in developing the Royal Kelantan socio-development projects, and dealing with the crisis in the southern part of Thailand. The methods of this study comprised of interviews with the Kelantan monarch and its officials before and during the 2007 Royal Commemoration of Universiti Malaysia Sabah and content research of written documents from archives and library research.

**Keywords:** Monarch Kelantan-Thailand Interactions, International Political System, Projek DiRaja Kelantan, Southern Thailand Crisis.

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## **1. Introduction**

This study analyses the contemporary role of the monarchy tradition in the modern international political system. Since the post-Westphalia Treaty 1648, the state system has been the prevailing system of government overshadowing others including the monarch institutions. The function of the monarch in a government has gradually reduced to a mere symbolic figure to convene ceremonial activities. By looking into the Malaysia monarchy institution, however, the institution is still playing some significant roles. Hence, the main objective of this study is to examine the current role of the monarch institution in Malaysia, especially in bolstering bilateral relation within the international political system. In doing so, the study focuses on the royal institution of Kelantan and its interaction with the royal family of Thailand, during the era of Al-Marhum Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Ismail Petra (1979-2010).

Being an active monarch institution in Malaysia, the Kelantan monarch institution and its interaction with Thailand royals is aptly chosen as the case study. In the past, the Kelantan royal had repeatedly stolen the limelight through its critiques and involvement on various issues. Among others is its critique on the formation of Malaysia which it believed founded without any consultation with the Majlis Raja-Raja (Suffian et al,1979:9-10 and 171-172;Bari,2002:32), a claim on its indirect involvement in the General Election 1990 which led to the downfall of Barisan Nasional to Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (APU) in Kelantan (Bari,2002:105-106), its dynamic efforts to champion the welfare of the people by investing in socio-economic projects or called as 'Projek DiRaja Kelantan' (Kelantan Royal Projects), and more importantly is the Kelantan monarch's close interaction with the royal family of Thailand. This noble interaction indirectly shows that despite different religion, Kelantan is famously known as 'Serambi Mekah' (Veranda of Mecca) for its Islamic religion reputation, and Thailand as one of the Buddhist states, dissimilarity does not hamper both royalists to augment their closeness for greater heights based on that account, the study endeavours to investigate why the relations of these two monarch families are close, and how they are able to preserve their mutual interactions which benefits both royal institutions? In discussing these two vital questions, the study splits the scope of discussion into three main points. Firstly, it attempts to uncover the position of the monarch institution in the

international political system vis-à-vis the predominant modern state system of government today. Secondly, it explores the early interactions of the Kelantan and Thailand monarchs which sets the bedrock of the present relations. Thirdly, it evaluates the role of Al-Marhum Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Ismail Petra as the main focus of the study, to maintain the relations with the Thai Royals, and simultaneously has benefitted both in developing the Royal Kelantan socio-development projects, and dealing with the crisis in the southern part of Thailand. The methods of this study comprised of interviews with the Kelantan monarch and its officials before and during the 2007 Royal Commemoration of Universiti Malaysia Sabah and content research of written documents from archives and library research.

## **2.Monarch Institution in the Modern International Political System**

As had been concerned the monarch institution is one of the remaining salient political features in the modern international political system. Since the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia that marked the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) in Europe (Goldstein,1994:24), 'the state system' as the new political system had replaced old ones which overwhelmingly dominated by religious institutions (Kegley and Wittkopf,1997:39; Jackson and Sorensen,2003:14; Mingst, McKibben and Arreguin-Toft,2018). This new system also swallowed other ancient kingdoms such as Dynasty Chou (1122-221 BC), Greece city-states (800-322 BC), feudal system, and et cetera (Holsti,1995:24-26).

The concept of state system in the modern international political structure refers to a political and social relation between various communities of distinct geopolitical entities (Jackson and Sorensen,2003:2). They actively interact with each other either through the expansion of commercial trade and diplomatic activities or the consolidation of power and influence by acquiring or colonising territories overseas. Every state system has its sovereignty and absolute political power over its domestic affairs in the international political system (Jackson and Sorensen,2003:11). They are also entitled to sign any treaties and conduct negotiations with other countries (Kegley and Wittkopf,1997:39). In other words, the advent of the state system after the Westphalia Treaty 1648 has dominated major discussions in the International Relations discipline which heavily concentrated on the state-centric, particularly for the realist theory.

The primary identity of the state system is that all communities of every state are free to decide the form of government they prefer most (Kegley and Wittkopf,1997:39). Nevertheless, most of the states, particularly in Europe, like Great Britain, France, Portugal, Germany and others, chose to adopt the monarch system as their governments after the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries (Rourke,1997:30). A monarch or a ruler had absolute power and full sovereignty over his or her people in the European state system which clearly against the bedrock of old tussle between the King, Pope and the Church during the Holy Roman Empire era (Kegley and Wittkopf,1997:13-14). After the end of the Thirty Year's War, limited intervention from the church institution further consolidated the power of a monarch.

Over several decades, the monarch institution in Europe gradually succumbed to the will of people for they demanded fair and just government to serve their interests. A few series of revolutions abruptly erupted to relinquish the power of the monarch starting with the Glorious Revolution in England in 1688 to annihilate King James II (1685-1688). They concurrently empowered the country's Parliamentary body as the symbol of the people's power (White and Hussey,1961:18). In 1789, another great revolution occurred in France known as 'the French Revolution' ultimately ended the monarch institution, and instantaneously passed the sovereignty torch to the people (Rourke,1997:31).

The ideological politics of people's power often closely associated with a democratic government, based on the spirit of nationalism (Goldstein,1994: 28-29) spread widely all over Europe including Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia as well as to other geopolitical entities like China Dynasty and the Ottoman Empire. This people's ideology diminished the absolute power of the monarch system; reduced it to appear as a mere religious symbol or ceremonial tradition (Rourke,1997:31-33). In conjunction with this, from the 20th century onwards, the world political system was dominated by Western-European democratic model (Rourke,1997:33), and many countries including Malaysia have embraced this model as their modern government political structure.

### **3. The Scenario of the Monarchy Institution in Malaysia**

Based on Malaysia experience, the monarch institution had been part of the government structure for so long since the Malacca Sultanate era in the fifteenth century or earlier (Andaya and Andaya,1982:37-75; Hashim, 1992; Othman,2002:2-8). The institution remained steadfast despite the arrival of the European imperialists. The Portuguese (1511-1641), the Dutch (1641-1824) and the British (1824-1957) brought with them different political ideologies. Nonetheless, not so much different with what had happened to the monarch institution in Europe, the Malay Rulers also faced the same fate as the absolute power they previously enjoyed gradually fade (Smith,1995: 2-3). Heading towards the 20th century, the main functions of a monarch were somewhat limited in certain areas only.

Factually, after the Second World War, the British attempted to weaken the supreme power of the Malay Rulers by introducing a policy called the 'Malayan Union'. This policy would enable the British Governor to gain the upper hand over the Malay Rulers in running the Malaya administration. The Rulers would only play a secondary or advisory role, and their power mainly confined in the matters of religion and Malay customs (Abas,1997: 12-29; Smith,1995:11-41; Gullick,1992:1-10). A group of Malay leaders led by Dato' Onn Jaafar, however, formed a political party named as United Malay National Organization or shortly known as 'UMNO' to pungently oppose the Malayan Union. Their effort led to the dissolution of the union. On a later date, the Malaya Federation which fairly reinstated the power of the Rulers came into being in 1948. One salient feature of the Malaya Federation is the establishment of a special Council for the Rulers; officially proclaimed as 'Majlis Raja-Raja' or the Rulers Council (Abas,1997:40; Bari, 2002:50). The Council functioned to sustain the utmost position of the Rulers in the government hierarchy, particularly in hearing, accepting and re-considering policies proposed by the British Malaya High Commissioner (Bari,2002:24-25).

Over the years, the emergence of many political parties had slowly eclipsed the role of monarch institution. Leading towards the 1950s, UMNO with other political partners, namely Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) had successfully secured independence from Great Britain on August 31st, 1957 (Yatim,2007:25). In preserving the monarchy tradition, the leaders of this country, especially the Malay Muslim

leaders, decided to form a democratic government based on the constitutional monarchy. Under this constitutional monarchy, the Council appoints 'Yang Di-Pertuan Agong' from the nine-state rulers on a rotational basis for every five-year term. The Yang Di-Pertuan Agong acts as the Head of State and the Commander in Chief of the Malaysia Government. In practice the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong is no longer directly involved in day-to-day operations as this responsibility is now the responsibility of the Prime Minister, and his or her cabinet ministers (Abas,1997:38-39; Bari,2002:7). However, this does not mean that Yang Di-Pertuan Agong is merely a symbolic figure or only convening ceremonial activities. Instead, the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong still hold major key decisions including to appoint a Prime Minister, which in the opinion of his royal highness will command majority confidence in the Dewan Rakyat (Parliament). Article 40(2)(a) and Article 43(2)(a) of the Federal Constitution (Federal Constitution,2018) clearly stipulate this absolute power.

#### **4.Early Interactions Sets the Bedrock of Intimate Relations**

The relation between Kelantan-Thailand Royal Monarchy is not something that has just begun recently. Close relationships between these two royal entities are within the collective knowledge of the Malaysian public. Historically, the northern states of the Malayan peninsular, i.e. Perlis, Kedah and those states in the East Coast like Kelantan and Terengganu has had strong ties with the government of Thailand (Previously known as Siam). The relation that existed before the arrival of British colonials began before Kelantan is known as Kelantan (Mohamed,1981:8-13, Suwannathat-Pian, 1984/85:95-97). According to Hikayat Seri Kelantan, ever since Kelantan was under the administration of Tuan Puteri Saadong, the state was already affected with the strong and powerful Siamese government (Osman,2006: 6).

The historical narratives of Kelantan depicted that the relation between the two royal institutions is a kind of inherited relation. It can be described as such because any inherited relation is formed over a long period akin to the relationship between Kelantan – Thailand monarchy institutions. Generally, initial interaction was established due to a series of actions taken by several Kelantanese royalties who sought interventions from the Siamese government to resolve conflicts over the throne. As a result of the Siamese government's continuous involvement in Kelantan's throne's rivalry, the

rulers of Kelantan proceeded to send ‘ufti’ to the Siamese government as a sign of respect and recognition of their leadership. The conflict pertaining the royal throne of Kelantan was said to have started after the demise of Long Yunus, the founding leader of Modern Kelantan state, i.e. the predecessor of current Kelantanese Royalties, Sultan Ismail Petra ibni Almarhum Yahya Petra (Nik Mohd. Salleh,2006:591). Long Yunus had successfully become the king after he defeated his brother, Long Muhammad, who was the ruler of Kota Kubang Labu at that time. With the aid of his allies, Long Jaafar and the Sultan of Terengganu, Long Yunus victoriously became the ruler of Kelantan in 1775 and sought to use “Yang Di-Pertuan as his title (Mohamed,1981:29; Nik Mohd. Salleh,1974; Rentse, 1936).

After the demise of Long Yunus in 1774, internal conflict occurred due to competitions amongst the royalties eyeing over the throne. A prominent local historian, Nik Mohd Salleh (2006) reaffirmed that the conflict of who should be the ruling king of Kelantan began after the passing of Long Yunus. In normal circumstances, the Crown Prince or the son of the previous king will inherit the throne. In the case of Long Yunus, the situation was different because no consensus was achieved between the offspring. Awaiting the resolution of the conflict over the throne, Tengku Muhammad, Long Yunus’s son in law was chosen to become the ‘acting’ king or temporary ruler of Kelantan. The situation worsened when Tengku Muhammad refused to let go of his temporary appointment after the consensus was finally reached among the heirs. The conflict over the throne that became Kelantan’s civil unrest had inadvertently paved the way for the Siam government to expand their influence in Kelantan. Such an opportunity was possible because those heirs involved in the disputes resorted to asking for either Siam government’s assistant or support for their quest. Support gained from the Siamese government served as an added advantage in their claims.

In the history of domestic unrest in Kelantan, Sultan Muhammad II Tuan Senik Mulut Merah or Tuan Senik Kampung Sireh reigned as the Ruling King of Kelantan from 1838 to 1886 was one of the earliest parties who sought the aid of Siamese King. Together with his brother, Tuan Senik Penambang, they collaborated to fight against their uncle, i.e. Long Zainal who killed their father, Long Tan. They were determined to prevent him

from being appointed to become the King of Kelantan by Sultan Muhammad I or Long Muhammad, the first son of Long Yunus. Long Muhammad is Long Tan and Long Zainal's elder brother. During the conflict, Sultan Muhammad II and his brother fought against Long Zainal and they asked for the support of Siamese government. After Sultan Muhammad II successfully gained the throne, the Siamese government recognised his success and later awarded him a title known as Phya Phipit Pakdi (Ibid). At the same time, his brother was also given a title called Phya Chao Puan (Ibid).

Since then, the Siamese ruler continued to play a pertinent role in the history of Kelantan royalties (Suwannathat-Pian,1985:19-20). For instance, to prevent conflict over the throne after the passing of Sultan Muhammad II, the Siamese ruler at that time, Raja Rama IV had from the early stage (i.e. in 1860) gave his recognition to the firstborn prince of the demised king, Tuan Sulong or Tuan Ahmad (Kelantan Genealogy,2000-2008). The recognition in question was the award of a title known as phrayâ Ratsadâthibodi Butburutphisçt or Tengku Seri Indera (Kelantan Genealogy,2000-2008). The award of the title was a form of guarantee that Tuan Ahmad will be appointed to become the King of Kelantan. To that, Sultan Muhammad II has also bestowed a title known as Phya Dicha which means 'the old king'/Raja Tua by Raja Rama IV on 4 Mac 1877 (Satu Chatetan mengenai Masalah Sengketa, Arkib, ARD/14). The complete title for Phya Dicha (Wyatt,1974:18) is phrayâ Dçhânuchitmahitsarâjânukulawibunlayaphakdi Seri Sultan Muhammad Rattanathâdâ Mahapathânâtthikân (Wyatt,1974:18) atau Phraya Devajunitha Mahesvara Rajanukula Vibunlaya Bakdiya Sri Sultan Muhammad Rattanathada Mahapaddana Adikara (Kelantan Genealogy,2000-2008).

As planned, Sultan Ahmad secured the throne in 1886. However, in 1889, he passed away. After his demise, the conflict over the throne recurred. This time, the disputes were amongst the offspring of Sultan Ahmad, i.e. Long Kundor, Long Mansor and Long Mahmud. Between the three princes, Long Kundor gained the strong support of Dato Laksamana, who is also known as Enche Saad bin Ngah (Satu Chatetan mengenai Masalah Sengketa, Arkib, ARD/14). To ensure, Long Kundor successfully secured the throne, Dato Laksamana better known as Dato' Maha Menteri (Nik Mohd Salleh,1974: 24) travelled to Bangkok to ask for Long Kundor to be recognised by the



King of Siam. Due to the chain of events that had taken place, it is apparent that recognition or confirmation from the Siamese government played a pivotal role in the appointment of Kelantan's ruler. Having gained the recognition of Siamese king, Long Kundor reigned as King of Kelantan, using Sultan Muhammad III as his title from 1889 to 1890. Unfortunately, Sultan Muhammad III did not get to rule for long as he passed away less than a year after claiming the throne. Once again conflict over throne erupted, and this time the competition was between Tuan Long Senik (the son of Sultan Muhammad III), the siblings of Sultan Muhammad III (Tuan Long Mansor and Tuan Long Mahmud) and the uncle to Sultan Muhammad III (Tuan Jaafar or Tuan Long Jaafar). The involvement of grandson to Sultan Muhammad II's youngest brother (Tuan Chik or Tengku Chik) complicated the conflict further. All of the competitors tried their level best to gain either the support of the Siamese King in Bangkok or the British Gabenor in Singapore (Satu Chatetan mengenai Masalah Sengketa, Arkib, ARD/14).

For the first time, the Siamese ruler sent a Siamese commissioner by the name Phra Ong Chau Sau to be stationed in Kota Bharu in 1891 (Ibid). The objective is to lessen the magnitude of the conflicts amongst the royalties and at the same, reinforced Siam's influence in Kelantan. Eventually, the King of Siam bestowed his recognition on Tuan Long Mansor, with the same title previously given to Sultan Muhammad II, i.e. Phya Phipit Pakdi, the King of Kelantan (Ibid). With the awarded title, Tuan Long Mansor successfully became the King of Kelantan and ruled until 1900. After the demise of Sultan Mansor without an heir, the conflict over the throne took place again, and this time, Sultan Mansor's brother (Tengku Chik Abdullah) acted as the facilitator to carry out negotiation between the conflicting parties. Once again, the representatives and letters were sent to Bangkok to request for assistance from the Siamese government. As a result of that, a group of Siamese armies led by Officer Phya Sukhum was sent to resolve the internal conflict in Kelantan (Nik Mohd Salleh,1974). With the support of the Siamese government, the son of Sultan Muhammad III, i.e. Tuan Long Senik was installed as the King of Kelantan and later awarded a title known as Phaya Deja in 1897 and in the year 1900, he received a higher title Phya Bibitpakdi (Kelantan Genealogy,2000-2008).

Since Tuan Long Senik was the ruler of Kelantan during the Treaty of English-Siamese 1909 was signed, he was responsible for the cease of Siamese influence on Kelantan when he agreed for Kelantan to become one of the British's protectorates states. He was later crowned as the Sultan of Kelantan as Sultan Muhammad IV on 22 June 1911. In other words, the presence of the British colonial in Tanah Melayu which began with the signing of the Treaty of English-Siamese on 10 Mac 1909 had led to a profound change to Kelantan – Siam relation. In fact, after 1911, Kelantan was no longer beleaguered with throne conflict. Long civil wars finally ended, and the selection, as well as the appointment of the ruling king, were carried out following the State of Kelantan Constitution. When Sultan Muhammad IV passed away, his son Tengku Ismail became the king, and he was later known as Sultan Ismail who ruled for 24 years starting from 1921 and ended in 1944. After the demise of Sultan Ismail without an heir, Tengku Ibrahim (Sultan Ismail's brother) replaced him, and he was the King of Kelantan from 1944 to 1960. During Tengku Ibrahim's reign, Kelantan was free from any invasion. Still, it was placed under the Siamese's administration until 16 August 1945, i.e. when the state was colonised by the British (Andaya and Andaya, 1982:248). After Siam declared war against the United States of America and Great Britain, the Japanese had made it easy for Siam to occupy Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu during the period of Japanese occupation (Fine, 1965:66-67).

Throughout Japanese occupation, the royal relation of Kelantan-Siam continued to be in good condition, and this was due to the way the Siamese government managed its relationship with Sultan Kelantan. It was apparent that the Siamese government respected and valued the vital role of the Sultan. The enforcement of any forms of laws, rules, and regulation did not take place without the approval of the Sultan, who later gave his consent through his signature. After Japan was defeated and World War II ended, Kelantan once again came under British Colonial power and on 1 February 1948, Kelantan became one of the states under the Federation of Malaya (Fine, 1965:66-67).

After Sultan Ibrahim passed away on 9 July 1960, his prince, Tengku Yahya Petra who was later known as Sultan Yahya Petra replaced his father. He was then appointed to become the sixth Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia on 21 September 1975. While Sultan Yahya Petra carried his duty as the

Agong, Kelantan Crown Prince, Tengku Ismail Petra was elected to become the acting King of Kelantan. Following the demise of his father on 29 Mac 1979, Sultan Ismail Petra became the King of Kelantan. Today, the current King of Kelantan is Sultan Muhammad V, and he is the 29th Sultan of Kelantan (Kelantan Genealogy,2000-2008).

The forged relationships of the two royal institutions began due to occasional domestic conflict surrounding competing for claims over the throne. At that time, the Siamese government had established itself as a robust, stable and influential power and thus, any support, assistance and titles gained from the Siamese government was fundamentally crucial. Table I shows the titles (Wyatt,1974:5) awarded by the Siamese government to the royalties or rulers of Kelantan as the evidence of their recognition. The award of titles was the Siamese government's brilliant strategy because the recognition that came with it sought to solidify the position of the ruler chosen to be installed as the King of Kelantan. Interestingly, the award of titles neither tied the King of Kelantan to any conditions nor restrained by any inhibition imposed by the Siamese government. Instead, they are given full power and freedom to implement domestic administration policies as they see fit. However, as a sign of utmost respect and appreciation, the rulers of Kelantan routinely delivered the ufti (payment tribute) to the Siamese government. Besides, the sending of ufti also served as the salient factor in enhancing the royal relations (Suwannathat-Pian,2002:1-3). The ufti symbolised token of long-standing friendships between the two monarchies as well as a symbol of Kelantan's loyalty towards the Siamese government at that time. Thus, it is apt to conclude that the practice of sending ufti once for every three years initiated by Sultan Muhammad II eventually established a continuous tradition of exchanging gifts and souvenirs between the two monarchies that persist until today, and this indirectly a clear manifestation of how close their relations are, especially during His Majesty Tuanku Ismail Petra era (Wyatt,1974:43).

**Table (1): The List of Recognitions and Titles Bequeathed to Kelantan Royalties by the Siamese King\***

<b>Title (in Thai Language)</b>	<b>Title (in Malay)</b>	<b>The Recipients</b>
Phya Phipit Pakdi	Sultan Kelantan (the King of Kelantan)/Raja Pemerintah (the Ruling King)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sultan Muhammad II or Sultan Mulut Merah/Tuan Senik Mulut Merah<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Tuan Long Mansor (Sultan Mansor)<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
Phya Chao Puan		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuan Senik Penambang<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
Phya Ratsada	Tengku Seri Indera Raja Tua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuan Ahmad (Sultan Ahmad)<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
Phya Decha		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sultan Muhammad II<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>

(\*Source: Adopted from “Satu Chatetan Mengenai Sengketa atas Takhta Kelantan dalam abad-abad 18-20 Masehi”, Malaysia Nasional Archive, ARD/14)

**Note:**

1.Sultan Muhammad II or Sultan Mulut Merah/Tuan Senik Mulut Merah ruled Kelantan from 1838 to 1886.

2.Tuan Long Mansor or Sultan Mansor became the ruling king from 1891 to 1900.

3.Tuan Senik Penambang was also known as Raja Dewa. He was the brother of Sultan Muhammad II and never installed as the ruling king of Kelantan.

4.Tuan Ahmad or Sultan Ahmad also known as Sultan Tengah or Marhum Tengah. He became the king of Kelantan from 1880 to 1889.

5.As a form of recognition from the King of Siam to Tuan Ahmad who was appointed as the ruling king to replace his father (Sultan Muhammad II). The title Phya Ratsada was bestowed to Tuan Ahmad and on the other hand, the title Phya Decha yang awarded to Sultan Muhammad II who, at the time, was an elderly.

### **5.The Role of His Majesty Tuanku Ismail Petra in Strengthening the Relations**

As Sultan Ismail Petra reigned on the throne for over 30 years, it is therefore justified to examine the Kelantan-Thailand monarchy interaction during his rule. His Majesty Tuanku Ismail Petra became as the 28th King of Kelantan after the passing of his father on 29 Mac 1979. His Majesty was born on 11 November 1949 at Istana Jahar, Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Born as the youngest child, he was also the only son to his parents, the late Sultan Yahya Petra and Raja Perempuan Zainab II (Omar,1995). At 70 years of age, Sultan Ismail Petra passed away at Raja Perempuan Zainab II Hospital in Kota Bahru, Kelantan (Ariff,2019).

Since childhood, His Majesty was exposed to various corpus of knowledge

such as the Islamic teachings, English language, history, geography and many others. His Majesty was also taught to be well-versed with the Kelantan royal practice and customs to prepare him to become the King of Kelantan in due time. He attended Maktab Sultan Ismail at Kota Bharu and then later his education continued through private tutoring from an English teacher at the palace (Ariff,2019:26).

Apart from being well-educated, His Majesty possessed a pleasant, well-mannered attitude with outstanding personality and credibility that suited his future role as the King of Kelantan. On the 4th December 1968, His Majesty tied the knot with Her Majesty Tengku Anis. From their marriage, the royal couple has four children, three boys (princes) and one girl (princess). The three princes are Tengku Muhammad Faris Petra Ibni Sultan Ismail Petra (the Crown Prince of Kelantan), Tengku Muhammad Faiz Petra Ibni Sultan Ismail Petra (Tengku Bendahara Kelantan) and Tengku Muhammad Fakhry Petra Ibni Sultan Ismail (Tengku Temenggong Kelantan). Meanwhile, the youngest child and the only princess is Tengku Amalina A'ishah Putri binti Sultan Ismail Petra. (Buku Khas Perayaan Kemahkotaan,1980).

Both His and Her Majesty were very close to their subjects and at the same time also valued the importance of having good relationships with neighbouring countries, particularly those that still maintain monarchy institutions in their political systems. The royal couple were involved in and continuously supported various welfare organisations throughout the state. They served as patrons of Persatuan Bekas Perajurit Malaysia, Cawangan Negeri Kelantan (the Kelantan branch of Malaysia Association of Retired Army), Jawatankuasa Pemulihan Orang-Orang Cacat Negeri Kelantan (Kelantan Committee of Disability Rehabilitation), Persatuan Menembak Kelantan (Kelantan Shooting Association), Persatuan Peladang Kelantan (Kelantan Farmers Association), Persekutuan Jaksa Pendamai (Federations of Commissioners of Oaths). Due to His Majesty's unwavering support and relentless commitments in various associations relating to the aspects of security and armed forces, he was bestowed the rank Honorary Royal Major and Honorary Royal Colonel Lieutenant in Territorial Army Regiment in 1974 and 1976 respectively. From 1988 until the end of his reign, His Majesty was appointed and served as Colonel-in-Chief in the Malaysian Royal Artillery Regiment (Omar,1995:27).

Her Majesty Tengku Anis, on the other hand, was active in various activities

and social programmes that contributed to forging good relations between the royalties and the public at large. Amongst the activities were Pesta Sukan Rakyat Keputeraan Ke Bawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Tuanku (Water Festival), Pertandingan Menembak Diraja Polis Malaysia (Malaysian Royal Police Force Shooting Competition), Majlis Solat Hajat dan Doa Selamat (Prayers Congregation), Majlis Mesra Anak Yatim dan Golongan Istimewa (Special Events for Orphans and Disable), Majlis Flora Negeri Kelantan (Kelantan Floral Event). Interestingly, Her Majesty was also personally involved in socio-economic development programme known as Projek Diraja Kelantan (Kelantan Royalty Project), a project initiated by both His and Her Majesty in 2001.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of international interactions, His Majesty Tuanku Ismail Petra is a committed royal leader in maintaining close relations with his counterparts from neighbouring countries. Due to this attribute, His Majesty had embarked on visits as well as cordially invited and received delegates from other countries. These arrangements are the kind of upbringing that His Majesty was exposed to since his childhood years. From the age of 13, His Majesty had embarked on various journeys and visits abroad to places such as Thailand, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong between the year 1962 and 1966. After His Majesty became the Sultan of Kelantan, he maintained this tradition throughout his reign.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, the relationships between the two royalties were enhanced during the reigning of His Majesty Tuanku Ismail Petra. His Majesty and Her Majesty enjoy close affinity with His Majesty King Bhumibol and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit. In 1962, during the reigning His Majesty Tuanku Yahya Petra as Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia, His Majesty King Bhumibol and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit made a royal visit to Malaysia as part of their Asia tour during that time. This particular visit marks a salient point in the relationship's milestone of the two monarchies as it signifies a continuation of a long-established tradition since the 19th century. Previously, King Chulalongkorn came to visit in 1871 (Huen,2009:46) and 1924, King Vajiravudh also made his visit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

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1. Interview with Encik Mohd Ramli @ Anuar Yacob, the Secretary for the Kelantan Royal Project on 25 January 2007, Kelantan.

2. Interview via telephone with Encik Mohd Najib Badruddin, Head of Media Unit, The Office of Sultan Kelantan, 18 September 2007.

the Kingdom of Thailand, 2012-2014). Interestingly, it should be pointed out that these visits are not mere visits as performed by other dignitaries from other countries in the modern system of international politics. Instead, those visits commemorate parsimonious relations between the two royal institutions akin to blood family relations. Although there are no family ties between the royals, Her Majesty Queen of Kelantan is known to have blood relations with the previous Malay Pattani Sultanate in Southern Thailand.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the formal royal visits, His Majesty and Her Majesty also frequently made informal visits. For instance, on 1 January 2006, a visit was made to Bangkok, and on 12 May in the same year, the royal couple embarked on a routine visit to Koh Samui (Buku Khas Perayaan Kemahkotaan, 1980). Of all the visits, the visit in 2002 was distinctly significant because, on the 08 January 2002, Her Majesty Queen of Kelantan was bestowed Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy in Political Science by King Bhumibol from University of Ramkhamhaeng.<sup>2</sup> Another landmark milestone is the presence of Queen Sirikit as the Royal Guest of Honour at the wedding ceremony of Kelantan's Crown Prince. On November 2004, His Majesty Tengku Muhammad Faris Petra wed Tengku Zubaidah binti Tengku Norudin, a daughter of Vairoj Pipit-pakdee. She is related to the heirs of King Yamu from Southern Thailand. The fact that the wedding was graced by presence of Queen Sirikit is veritably profound as it signified an epitome of notable rapport that existed between the two monarchies (Vatikiotis, 2004).

It is also interesting to note that Queen Sirikit took an exceptionally endearing effort when she attended the wedding. Her Majesty brought with her Thailand Foreign Minister at that time, Surakiart Sathiarathai as well other officials as part of her royal entourage to attend the wedding of Kelantan Crown Prince.<sup>3</sup> In another occasion, Queen Sirikit was also present during the Silver Jubilee Birthday Celebration of His Majesty Sultan Ismail Petra. During her stay in Kelantan, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit was taken on

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1. Interview with Dato' Haji Jamil bin Mohamed, Director of Kelantan Land and Mines Department on 25 January 2007.

2. Interview via telephone with Encik Mohd Najib Badruddin, Head of Media Unit, The Office of Sultan Kelantan, 18 September 2007.

3. Interview with Dato' Haji Jamil bin Mohamed, Director of Kelantan Land and Mines Department on 25 January 2007.

a state tour especially hosted by His Majesty Sultan Ismail and Her Majesty Tengku Anis. Included in the tour's itinerary are visits to several prominent Buddhist temples situated in Tumpat. The existence of Buddha worships places manifests Kelantan's unique elements of tolerance in religious practices which in turn culminates harmonious relations amongst Kelantanese.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, the outstanding rapport of the two royal institutions has had positive impacts on the well beings of the Kelantanese in particular and on Malaysians. The Kelantan royal institutions had received several official delegations from Thailand, and both His Majesty and Her Majesty highly appreciated the efforts taken. On 27 November 2006, the Kelantan royal institution received an official visit from Thailand Royal Police force headed by Assistant Commissioner General, Adul Sangsingkeo. On another occasion, the palace received some delegations composed of Thailand notable scholars and prominent corporate figures. Official visits from various sectors of Thailand's government clearly illustrated outstanding good relations between the two royal institutions.

The good royal relations with Thailand monarchy also benefitted the public at large. In 2001, His Majesty Sultan Ismail Petra launched a project known as 'the Kelantan Royal Project' (Projek Diraja Kelantan). This project is a socio-economic development initiative by the Kelantan royal institution functioned as a catalyst to improve the living standard of the rural communities in Kelantan. The impetus for this project came about after close interaction with the Thailand royal counterpart. The Kelantan royal now undertakes a project successfully carried by the Thailand royal institution to alleviate the living standard of their people for the benefits of the Kelantanese. On the one hand, Thailand is famous for its massive and thriving agriculture industry and on the other, Thailand royal institution is actively pursuing community agriculture development projects. The combination of these two factors and the established good rapport had consequently led the Kelantan royal institution to gain immense benefits through sharing of experience, knowledge and ideas.

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1. Interview with His Royal Highness Sultan and Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan Kelantan, Kelantan Royal Palace, 2 June 2007.



The good relations between two royal institutions had also contributed to the easing of domestic conflicts that occurred in Southern Thailand. It has been acknowledged that both His Majesty Sultan Ismail and Her Majesty Tengku Anis took up a crucial role in assisting to curb if not resolve the conflict. The next section discusses how both Monarchs exchange their own experiences for the benefits of the Kelantan Royal Project and Southern Thailand conflict in detail. At this juncture, it is apt to conclude that interactions and close affinity between the Kelantan – Thailand royal institutions are mutually beneficial; both parties reciprocate and complement each other's needs. In the process, the subjects of the reigns also gained abundantly from the royals' venture.

#### **6. Projek DiRaja Kelantan (Kelantan Royal Project)**

Despite the efforts of the Malaysian government to uplift Malaysia to becoming a developed country by the year 2020, Kelantan remains as one of the poor states in the country (Tan Abdullah, et al., 2016; Habibullah, et al., 2018). The poverty issue in the state had attracted not only the attention of the Federal Government but also that of His Majesty Sultan and Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan Kelantan, Tengku Anis Almarhum Tengku Abdu Hamid. The royal's empathy was clearly expressed when the Raja Perempuan Kelantan received the honorary Doctorate (on behalf of His Royal Highness) in Agriculture Development from Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) on 16 September 2006. She was quoted as saying "penderitaan mereka air mata saya" ("their pain is my tears") which showed the concerns of both the Sultan and the Raja Perempuan (Arshad, 2006).

The primary purpose of the launching of the Projek DiRaja (Royal Project), in which both His Royal Highness Sultan Ismail Petra and Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan Kelantan Tengku Anis act as the Patron and the advisor of the project respectively, is to assist the poor and reduce the poverty rate in Kelantan. This project took off through a concerted effort by utilising the resources that are available in the state. The aim is to improve people's economic status, especially farmers, breeders and fishermen to be self-sufficient and independent.

Various programmes had been organised from which the ideas came from Her Royal Highness. These include the Independent Workers Fund, Sultan Ismail Petra Postgraduate Scholarship, Tengku Anis Scholarship Fund and

socio-economic programmes in ten Kelantan districts. The districts are Jajahan Pasir Mas, Pasir Puteh, Tumpat, Machang, Kuala Krai, Jeli, Bachok, Gua Musang, Tanah Merah and Kota Bharu. All agricultural and developmental agencies that are directly or indirectly related to agriculture had been utilised to strengthen the project. Every district was evaluated in terms of its soil and environment to accommodate the suitable commodity or product (See Table 2).

The Royal Project signified the direct involvement of the Sultan in such projects. His Royal Sultan and Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan would always officiate and extend their support in the designated programmes. Among the launched projects are mushroom cultivation project, clustered/integrated vegetable planting, cash crop, sheep husbandry, flowers, *pandan* coconut and others. As shown in Table 2, the activities that fall under the umbrella of Projek DiRaja include the planting of *pandan* coconut and *keli* aquaculture project in Jajahan Pasir Mas, honeydew and cattle breeding in Jajahan Kuala Krai as well as 'mini-estate' and seasonal farming in Jajahan Kota Bharu (Buku Khas Perayaan Sempena Ulang Tahun Hari Keputeraan, 2005).

In 2006, Her Majesty launched several other projects. These include Klinik Projek DiRaja, Strawberry Planting Project, Mushroom Planting Project, Youth Royal Project and Royal Kiosk Project. In the meantime, several research projects were also carried out such as charcoal production, processed canned fruit juices, cash crops, Bangladesh sheep farming, quail, peacock and small pulp and paper factories in several districts of Kelantan. The Projek DiRaja is a unique project for it involves the personal touch of His Royal Highness Sultan and Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan. Their willingness to be close to the people signifies their care and love to their subjects. Another vital point to be made here is that the Projek DiRaja has similarities with the approach used by King Bhumibol, the King of Thailand. King Bhumibol was loved by his people (Davis, 1981:31-32). He used to launch many royal developmental projects to help the people to progress. The developmental projects consisted of eight categories that were development water sources, agriculture, environment, occupational promotion, public health, transportation, welfare and others (Royal Development Project, 2019).

The similarity of approaches was due to the continuous close interactions

between the two Royalties. Besides, the People's Development Project introduced and implemented by King Bhumibol had inspired the launching of Projek DiRaja Kelantan. Also, the Royal institution of Thailand had extended technical assistance in the promotion of Projek DiRaja Kelantan especially by conducting courses in Kelantan on mushroom cultivation, seedings of pandan coconut and others.<sup>1</sup> This indirectly strengthens the argument that the monarch institution is still relevant and has a distinct role in assisting the government to address the challenges faced by the people and promotion better bilateral relationship.

Even though most of the monarch institutions in the modern era do not possess the executive power and merely serves symbolically, the implementation of developmental projects such as this benefits the socio-economic aspect of the society and economic growth of the nation.

**Table (2): Projek DiRaja Kelantan Based on Districts\***

<b>Districts</b>	<b>Main Projects</b>	<b>Side Projects</b>	<b>Year Implemented</b>	<b>Launched Date</b>
Pasir Mas	Pandan coconut (20acres) in Desa Wangi, Mukim Apam, Gual Periuk District	a) Pineapple, papaya and vegetables in Bendang, Tok Rusa, Meranti b)Keli & Tilapia aquaculture, chicken	2001	20 October 2000
Pasir Puteh	Fresh water aquaculture in Kg Wakaf Bunut, Bukit Jawa	a) Hiasan Fish b)Pekasam Fish	2001	28 October 2001
Tumpat	Chicken of French half- breed in Kg Belian, Kok Keli, Sungai Pinang	a) Chicken b)Others	2001	30 April 2002
Machang	a) Vegetable planting project in Kg Gelong Gajah b) Salak planting (20 acres) in Perkampungan Pondok Hidayat II, Machang c)Developing 40 acres of fruit	a) Banana, pineapple and papaya b) Chicken farming c)Herbs (Tongkat Ali)	2002	14 July 2002

1. Interview with Encik Mohd Ramli @ Anuar Yacob, the Secretary for Kelantan Royal Project on 25 January 2007, Kelantan.

	orchards - in Bukit Baka (Phase II)			
Kuala Krai	Limau Madu	a) Cow farming (5.8 acres) in Kg. Batu Balai (Desa Takwa)	2002	15 October 2002
Jeli	Ternakan udang galah dalam kolam air tawar in Kg. Janggut Sungai Long, Jeli	a) Salak b) Durian c) Ikan Keli	2002	
Bachok	Tanaman Padi berkelompok (50 acres) in Bendang Rusa, Jelawat and Padang China	a) Ikan Keli and Duck b) Chillies	2002	15 October 2002
Gua Musang	Processing and Marketing Centre for local light food products	Fruit pickles	2002	29 August 2002
Tanah Merah	Ternak kambing Boer	Dokong, Durian and Rambutan	2002	
Kota Bharu	a) Vegetable cultivation in Kg. Hutan Banggol, Mukim Badang (land owned by MAIK) b) Fruit and vegetable Mini Estate (20 acres) in Kg. Bentong, Salor. Including: Lady fingers, sweet corn, honey pumpkin (labu madu), sweet potato and musk melon.	Cash crops : Watermelon, honey pumpkin (labu madu) honey dew, chillies, long beans, lady fingers, cucumber	2002	06 August 2002

(\*Source: "Projek DiRaja Kelantan Report 2005" in Buku Khas Perayaan Sempena Ulang Tahun Hari Keputeraan Ke Bawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Al-Sultan Kelantan Yang Ke-56, Kota Bharu, Kelantan 2006 and interview with Encik Mohd Ramli @ Anuar Yacob, Secretary of Kelantan Royal Project, 25 January 2007, Kota Bharu Kelantan).

### **7.The Southern Thailand Conflict**

The unrest in the Malay-Muslim provinces of Southern Thailand has caught international attention due to the instability and the brutal response of the

Thai government in the issue. History had witnessed series of struggles towards the central leadership of the Thai government by the Southern Thai people. One notable example is the struggle of the Malay rulers towards the Thesaphiban system, i.e. the Local Administration Act. The system is question is a system of national integration introduced by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab in 1897 to limit the power of local rulers, including the Sultan of Pattani (Abdullah,2010:67; Deraman,2003:317). Other examples include the struggle of the clerics (Syukri, 2002) as well as the struggle for freedom. The struggle of the Southern Thais towards the central government had resulted in injuries and casualties.

Even though the political boundary separates Kelantan with the Southern Thai provinces, the relationship between the societies of these two political entities continues until today. The commonalities in terms of language, religion and culture shared by them have made their ties even closer despite the difference of nationalities (Ismail,1996:23-37). Hence, the challenges faced by the Southern Thais would affect the sensitivities of Malaysians, especially in Kelantan.

Internal conflict experienced by a country does not necessarily mean that it can be regarded as a matter of domestic affairs because it could also have a spillover effect. The situation could even become more complicated when a conflict involving a minority group who somehow has family connections with the peoples of neighbouring countries (Rourke,1999:130-131). The Southern Thai conflict erupted due to the struggle of the Malay community to free themselves from the injustices of their government. There are several factors attributed to the conflict. These include poverty, social discrimination, assimilation policy, as well as Thai's government change of policy (Croissant,2005:21-43; Nik Mahmud,1999). The conflict has somehow impacted on Malaysia-Thailand bilateral relationship. Even though the overall relationship remained stable, the series of bloodsheds that took place in Southern Thai had occasionally soured the Malaysia-Thailand diplomatic relations. Malaysia's official stance has always been clear that Kuala Lumpur does not interfere into the internal affairs of other countries, based on ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) signed in 1976 (Seah,2012).

However, Malaysia's attitude on the issue had changed over time when many Malays became victims of police brutality. Malaysia plays an important role, particularly in improving the security situation in Southern Thailand. Nevertheless, the bilateral relations between the two countries deteriorated when the conflict escalated. The responses shown by the Thai government in dealing with the conflict was a hard-line approach. Kuala Lumpur was unhappy with the development. As such in 2004, for example, Thai's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra sought the help of his Malaysian counterpart, Abdullah Badawi to help contain the violence. Thai government believed that the insurgency in Southern Thai was due to several reasons such as bandit activities, response to the global war on terrorism and believed to be orchestrated and funded by drug and oil smugglers (Bangkok Post,2011). Meanwhile, the Malaysian government viewed that one of the root causes is poor socio-economic conditions. In response, both governments had agreed to set up a Joint Development Strategy (JDS) to boost economic linkages. Besides, the Malaysian government had also sent Islamic scholars in the area to propagate the actual teachings of Islam (Storey,2007). In this connection, the Kelantan Royal family was in a better position in expressing Malaysia's concerns over the issue. Such position is made possible through the good traditional royal connections between His Royal Highness Sultan and the Raja Perempuan of Kelantan with His Royal Highness King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit of Thailand. His Royal Highness Sultan and his family often visit the Kingdom of Thailand whether on official or private visits, especially the Raja Perempuan of Kelantan Yang Maha Mulia Tengku Anis who has family relations with the former Malay Pattani Sultanate. Likewise, the royal family of Thailand often visit the state of Kelantan. Queen Sirikit, for example, had attended the royal wedding ceremony of the Crown Prince of Kelantan, Tengku Muhammad Faris Petra.<sup>1</sup>

The cordial connections between the two royal institutions have given the advantage to the Sultan of Kelantan to play an essential role in the Southern Thai conflict. Nevertheless, as a show of respect for the non-interference principle of ASEAN, the involvement of His Royal Highness in this conflict is seen to be symbolic. The Sultan of Kelantan had been successful in

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1. Interview with Dato' Haji Jamil bin Mohamed, Director of Kelantan Land and Mines Department on 25 January 2007.

showing on the manner Kelantan treats its minority, the Buddhist, in a majority Muslim populated state. On several occasions, the Sultan and the Raja Perempuan Kelantan had accompanied leaders from the Thai Royal family, including Queen Sirikit to visit Buddhist religious centres in Tumpat Kelantan. These visits indirectly showed that there is a strong religious tolerance in Kelantan from which Thailand could emulate.<sup>1</sup>

Religious tolerance is one of the crucial elements that form the identity of Kelantan state. Although Islam is the official religion of the state, other believers are free to practice their religious beliefs. The development of Islam in Kelantan is significant such that 'Serambi Mekah' (Veranda of Mecca) is the state's nickname. History has recorded that Kelantan had long been the centre of Islam during the 18th Century and had attracted students from Cambodia, Sumatera and Malay Peninsula (Tanah Melayu) to learn Islam (Roff,1974; Nik Hassan,1983). His Royal Highness was a Sultan who concerned about the development of Islam in the state. Despite being the state's Head of the Religion, he had always upheld the freedom of religion. In line with the teachings of Islam, the religion forbids any forms of discrimination towards the non-believers. (Zaidan,2000:65-70).

A manifestation of His Royal Highness' religious tolerance attitude was his treatment towards the minorities in the state. According to 2010 census, the Malays and other indigenous forms the majority of the population in Kelantan with 95.7%, followed by the Chinese with 3.4%, Indians 0.3% and other groups 0.6% (Population and Housing Census of Malaysia,2010). The minorities such as the Chinese and Siamese are the main Buddhist believers in Kelantan. Many vital symbols reflect their established belief in Kelantan such as the Buddhist statue, temples or wat and the Council of the Religion of Buddha or Sangha (Ismail,2006).

His Royal Highness had given his consent that allowed the building of the Sangha organization in Kelantan and recognised the appointment of a bikhu leader (Ismail,1996), his deputy as well as the heads of bikhus in other districts.<sup>2</sup> In return, His Royal Highness was recognised as the protector of the religion of Buddha with the title 'Phuttasanupathampok' (Mohd.

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1. Interview with His Royal Highness Sultan and Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan Kelantan, Kelantan Royal Palace, 2 June 2007.

2. Interview with Dr Mohamed Yusoff Ismail, a retired Professor at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kota Bharu Kelantan, 15 March 2007.

Ghazali,2003:41). Such recognition acknowledges His Royal Highness's approach in promoting tolerance and respect toward all of his subjects. According to Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan Kelantan, evidence of positive development is apparent when the government of Thai permitted the Muslim minorities in Southern Thai to proclaim the adzan or call for prayer.<sup>1</sup> As a gesture of Muslim brotherhood, His Royal Highness Sultan continued to extend assistance towards the victims of the Southern Thai conflict whenever necessary.

### **8. Conclusion**

The monarch institutions in many modern democracies may seem to have limited powers and undertake the mere ceremonial or symbolic role. In Malaysia, its position complements the 'constitutional monarch' of the country's democratic political system. As in the case of the Sultan of Kelantan, His Royal Highness Sultan Ismail Petra had played an extraordinary role in promoting the significance of the monarch institution in Malaysia. Besides being actively involved in many welfare and social programmes, His Royal Highness the Sultan of Kelantan managed to maintain and strengthen the traditional royal connection between Kelantan and Thailand to the extent that it had positively impacted the wellbeing of the people and country. Based on the Kelantan-Thailand royal interactions that had begun since the early 19th Century, His Royal Highness continued to invigorate their traditional ties. The launch of the Projek DiRaja Kelantan in 2001 portrays high affinity between the two monarchies. The project was a reflection on the approach undertaken by the Thai royal institution that had been very successful in promoting socio-economic development in Thailand.

Moreover, the initiatives of His Royal Highness Sultan and Her Royal Highness Raja Perempuan Kelantan in easing the Southern Thai conflict were also significant. In principle, their roles are merely symbolic; nevertheless, it has had indirect positive consequences, particularly in a situation where the hard-line approach is not necessarily the preferred course of action. On the other hand, Kelantan's exemplary practice of religious tolerance and His Majesty Sultan's just treatment towards the

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1. Interview with His Majesty Sultan Ismail Petra and Her Majesty Tengku Anis at the Kelantan Royal Palace, Kelantan, 2 Jun 2007.



minorities may encourage the Thai government to emulate such an approach.

The roles of the monarch in modern times often perceived as insignificant, nonetheless, in the case of Kelantan and Thailand, the monarch institutions had profoundly influenced the interactions of both countries. All in all, the continuous Kelantan-Thailand royal interactions in the contemporary era illustrates that the monarch institutions could still play a pertinent role, especially as a 'sub-system' in international politics.

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