

Rich royal history

With the installation of the 14th Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah last Wednesday, **Aneeta Sundararaj** revisits the history of Kedah and its sultanate

HAVE you ever wondered what happened before Malacca was discovered? Where did travellers stop during their trade journeys between the East and the West? Head for the State Museum in Alor Star and learn how Kedah, in particular the Bujang Valley and its surrounding area, was once a thriving and prosperous entrepot.

The well-thought-out displays in the museum highlight the known history of Kedah which began close to 2,000 years ago. Some early notations of Kedah appeared in a Tamil poem titled *Pattinappalai*, written either in the 2nd or 3rd Century.

Datuk Dr Wan Shamsudin Mohd Yusof, an expert in Kedah history and chairman of the History Association Of Malaysia, Kedah Branch, says evidence from the archaeological findings in Bujang Valley shows that there were Buddhist and Hindu settlers in this region. Indeed, Kadaram and Langkasuka are the ancient names for Kedah.

Then there was an expedition by Tamil king Rajendra Chola I in the 11th Century, who established his merchant and naval fleet to become one of the most powerful in this region.

The word "Kedah", explains Wan Shamsudin, "some think it comes from the word 'Kheddah', meaning elephant trap. Others think it's from an Arabic word which means stemmed glass."

Another possibility is "Kalabar" or "Khadar". One of the sources Wan Shamsudin refers to is *Al-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah*.

"The original was written in Jawi. When the material was translated into rumi, the text was not identical," says the historian, explaining the differences in interpretation.

Despite the discrepancies, it's evident that one of the first rulers of Kedah came from Persia and he carried the title Maharaja Derbar Raja. The title Maharaja was used until the ninth ruler of Kedah, Maharaja Derbar Raja II.

In the 12th Century, a Muslim



Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah was responsible for modernising Kedah

scholar from Yemen, Syeikh Adbullah Syeikh Jaafar Quamiri, had an audience with the then ruler of Kedah. The Maharaja subsequently embraced Islam and started using the title Sultan and was henceforth known as Sultan Mudzaffar Shah.

So detailed is his knowledge of the Kedah Sultanate that Wan Shamsudin is able to tell you, from memory, the order in which the Sultan's ruled Kedah, the exact dates of their reign and what each ruler achieved. That said, of the 28 Sultans who had ruled Kedah, Wan Shamsudin, too, has his favourites.

"Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal

Adilin Mu'adzam Shah II (1710-1778) was the 19th Sultan and the first to travel extensively. He first travelled to Sumatra and Java before going to India. He was the one who brought back the nobat (royal drum). A teacher, Syeikh Abdul Jalil, also followed him back. When he became the Sultan, he moved the administrative centre to Kota Setar.

"Then there's Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah II (1804-1845). At the start of his reign, Kedah was under attack by the Siamese. He asked the British for help but didn't get any. So he had to flee to Malacca. There, he gathered his troops and, eventually, recaptured Kota Setar.

He's a hero," says Wan Shamsudin with pride.

He will, nevertheless, admit that the victory came at a price, whereby the size of Kedah became smaller when Perlis was handed over to Syed Hussain Jamalullail and Kubang Pasu to one Tunku Anum.

Wan Shamsudin's all-time favourite Sultan is the 26th ruler, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah. "He modernised Kedah," explains Wan Shamsudin.

Two of the Sultan's progeny (with eight wives, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah had over 40 children and, at the time of his death, over 90 grandchildren) created history in Malaysia: Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj ibni Almarhum Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah, the country's first prime minister, and the present Sultan of Kedah, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, who is the first Sultan to become the Yang di-Pertuan Agong twice.

"When Masjid Zahir was officially opened on Oct 15, 1915, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah 'mengimamkan solat Jumaat' (led the Friday prayers) and the Regent, Tunku Mahmud, 'membaca khutbah' (read the khutbah). No ruler has ever carried out these tasks. This was amazing," says Wan Shamsudin.

Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah also travelled overseas, thereby forging friendships with many of the world's leaders. For instance, during the coronation of King George V, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah was made a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. Such hospitality was reciprocated to the extent that when King Chulalongkorn visited Kedah, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah consented to the nobat being played to welcome the Siamese ruler.

Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah's tengkolok (headdress) now rests in a glass display at the Royal Museum, located in the heart of Alor Star. The notations beside this display explain that the set of diamonds that once adorned this headdress is now affixed to the ceremonial headdress of the present Sultan of Kedah.

"Locals believe that if Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah's tengkolok is lost, Kedah will lose everything," says Wan Shamsudin.

The historian points out that there is still a strong belief that Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah continues to bring prosperity to the state. This is precisely why you'll find a framed photo of the Sultan hanging on the walls of many establishments in Alor Star.

Wan Shamsudin concludes by saying that with the installation of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, the people of Kedah are indeed feeling proud. Such pride is based on the knowledge and understanding that this is a ruler whose history is rooted to the land and goes back more than 1,000 years.

KEDAH DARUL AMAN'S LIST OF SULTANS

1. Sultan Al-Mudzaffar Shah I (1136-1179)
2. Sultan Mu'adzam Shah (1179-1201)
3. Sultan Muhammad Shah (1201-1236)
4. Sultan Muzzil Shah (1236-1280)
5. Sultan Mahmud Shah I (1280-1321)
6. Sultan Ibrahim Shah (1321-1373)
7. Sultan Sulaiman Shah I (1373-1422)
8. Sultan Ataulah Muhammad Shah I (1422-1472)
9. Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Adilin Mu'adzam Shah I (1472-1506)
10. Sultan Mahmud Shah II (1506-1546)
11. Sultan Mudzaffar Shah II (1546-1602)
12. Sultan Sulaiman Shah II (1602-1619)
13. Sultan Rijaluddin Muhammad Shah (1619-1651)
14. Sultan Muhyiddin Mansor Shah (1651-1661)
15. Sultan Dhiuddin Mukarram Shah I (1661-1687)
16. Sultan Ataulah Muhammad Shah II (1687-1698)
17. Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah I (1698-1706)
18. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah I (1706-1709)
19. Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Adilin Mu'adzam Shah II (1710-1778)
20. Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah II (1778-1798)
21. Sultan Dhiuddin Mukarram Shah II (1798-1804)
22. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah II (1804-1845)
23. Sultan Zainal Rashid Mu'adzam Shah I (1845-1854)
24. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah (1854-1879)
25. Sultan Zainal Rashid Mu'adzam Shah II (1879-1881)
26. Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (1882-1943)
27. Sultan Badlishah (1943-1958)
28. Sultan Haji Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (1958-present)