The Death and Funeral of His Late Majesty
Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibni Tuanku Muhammad,
First Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Persekutuan Tanah Melayu

by
M. Sheppard
Keeper of Public Records

His Majesty’s death in his sleep at the Istana Negara, Kuala Lumpur, was confirmed by the Court Physician* at 4.00 a.m. on Friday, 1st April, 1960, and the information was conveyed as quickly as possible to the other Rulers, the four Undang of Negri Sembilan, the Prime Minister, the Governors, Heads of Diplomatic Missions, Service Chiefs, the Press and Radio, prominent Muslim Religious officials and certain heads of Government Departments. Heads of Federation Missions overseas were informed by cable.

The first announcement was made over Radio Malaya at just after 6.00 a.m. and a salute of 27 guns was fired by the 1st Field Battery Federation Artillery from Bluff Road at 8.20 a.m. Federation flags were flown at half mast from the time of the announcement till sunset on the day of the royal funeral, and a period of 44 days official mourning was announced, during which those wearing Malay dress were requested to wear a white band round the songkok and others to wear a black tie or a black arm band or both.

* The Court Physician is the person who certifies the death of the Sultan.
Banquet Hall where a seven tiered platform had been erected. A canopy of yellow silk shaded the coffin, with curtains at the four corners, and the Royal Coat of Arms stood at the centre of each of the four sides above the level of the canopy roof. The coffin was draped with the Royal Standard and the Federation flag.

At either end of the platform at the head and foot of the coffin a tall urn was placed, made of Trengganu white metal in which incense and “stanggi” smouldered continuously. On two tables at floor level standing a short distance away from the platform at the head and foot of the coffin, were placed His Late Majesty’s ceremonial regalia, jewelled headdress, buckle and belt and State Kris (at the head) and his insignia and honours laid on yellow velvet cushions (at the foot). The preparation of the Banquet Hall was under the direction of the Grand Chamberlain.†

As soon as His Majesty’s death was confirmed the reading of the Koran was begun by members of the palace staff and this was continued without a break day and night until the coffin was removed to take part in the funeral procession on Sunday.

About 60 religious officials from different parts of Selangor took part under the direction of Imam Haji Abdul Wahab and Imam Rasul. Four persons sat at the corners of the coffin facing inwards and took it in turns to read, until they were relieved by others.

Regalia Bearers and Bentara leaving the Istana near the head of the procession. 3.4.60

* Dr. E. A. Hardy, O.B.E.
† Dato Seri Amar di-Raja.
On the day following his death, the body of His Late Majesty lay in state, under continuous vigil by officers of the Federation Armed Forces and of the Royal Federation of Malaya Police, standing at the four corners of the platform, facing outwards, on floor level. These officers were on duty for 20 minutes each at a time and rested for 40 minutes. Four parties of four officers shared the Vigil for each twelve hour period. The general public were admitted to the Banquet Hall to pay their last respects from 11.15 a.m. until midnight and thousands of men, women and children of all communities formed an unending procession of silent mourners, climbing slowly up the long flight of stone steps from the wide lawn which borders Lornie Road, and filing through the air-conditioned Banquet Hall, and out past the long shelter where scores of wreaths scented the still air making a multi-coloured setting for the orange and black uniforms of the Nobat players.

Naval Ratings drawing the gun carriage bearing the Coffin away from Istana Negara. 3.4.60.

Earlier in the morning many of Their Highnesses the Rulers and the Governors of Penang and Malacca, the Prime Minister, High Commissioners and Ambassadors accredited to His Late Majesty, holders of high offices and Cabinet Ministers had paid their respects individually. When the doors of the Istana finally closed at midnight on April 2nd it was estimated that at least 50,000 persons had filed past the coffin.

Intensive preparations for the funeral procession were undertaken as soon as news of His Majesty’s death was received. Naval and military detachments and Police rehearsed their arduous duties with such thoroughness that when the ceremony took place on Sunday morning April 3rd they gave a faultless performance.

The procession was timed to leave the Istana Negara at 8.50 a.m. but long before this hour thousands of people had lined the entire one and three-quarter mile route, crowding many of the vantage points ten deep. The route of the procession was from the Istana by Taylor Road right into Lornie Road, along Embankment Road and Foch Avenue into High Street and Market Street, past the side of the General Post Office into Victory Avenue where an immense concourse had gathered, converging on to the Railway Station.
Detachments of Federation Army:
1st Reconnaissance Corps
7th Royal Malay Regiment
6th Royal Malay Regiment
5th Royal Malay Regiment
Band of the Royal Federation of Malaya Police
The Grand Chamberlain
Comptroller of the Household
12 Regalia Bearers, 5 Bentaras, 20 Umbrella Bearers and 20 Spear Bearers
The Muftis of Negri Sembilan and Selangor and other Muslim Religious officials
Five Drummers of 5th Royal Malay Regiment (who beat slow march time for the gun carriage detachment during the whole length of the procession)
1st Division of the Sovereign’s Escort
The Gun Carriage bearing the Royal Coffin draped with the Federation Flag and the Royal Standard was drawn by 100 ratings of the Royal Malayan Navy (50 in front and 50 in the rear of the Gun Carriage).
The yellow covered Gun Carriage was flanked by eight Pall Bearers.

The Grand Chamberlain (Dato Seri Ammar Di-Raja) leading the procession in Lornie Road.

Dato Abdul Aziz bin Haji Abdul Majid, P.M.N., P.J.K., Head of the Civil Service.


Enche Abu Bakar bin Baginda, J.P., Mentri Besar Selangor, representing the Mentri2 Besar and Chief Ministers.

Dato Sambanthan, P.M.N., Minister of Works, Post and Telecommunications, representing the Cabinet.


Tun Leong Yew Koh, S.M.N., Minister of Justice representing the Order of Pangkuan Negara.

Rear Detachment of Royal Malay Navy (flanked by 14 Coffin Bearers from the 5th Malay Regiment, all of them Warrant Officers or Sergeants selected for their physique).

Insignia Bearers

Col. Yeop Mahidin bin Md. Shariff


D.S.P. Abdul Majid bin Haji Ismail, Police A.D.C. to His Majesty.

Brig. Raja Lope Nor Rashid, J.M.N.

Che’ Mohd. Yusof bin Ahmad, J.M.N., Civilian A.D.C. to His Majesty.

Maj. Maulud bin Haji Abdul Samad, Military A.D.C. to His Majesty.

*The procession in Victory Avenue, approaching the Railway Station, on 3.4.60.*
First Royal Car
Second Royal Car
Principal Mourners

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Y.M. Tunku Abdullah</td>
<td>His Highness the Regent of Negri Sembilan, Tunku Munawir</td>
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<tr>
<td>His Highness The Raja Muda of Selangor</td>
<td>His Excellency The Governor of Malacca</td>
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<tr>
<td>His Highness the Sultan of Brunei</td>
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The Deputy Prime Minister, Federation of Malaya
Tun Abdul Razak bin Dato Hussain, S.M.N.

Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya
Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al Haj

Mr. Ural Alexis Johnson, Personal Representative of President Eisenhower
The Vice-President of the Republic of Vietnam,
His Excellency Nguyen Ngoc Tho

Members of His Late Majesty’s Family

Personal Representatives of Their Highnesses the Rulers
High Commissioners and Ambassadors accredited to His Late Majesty Members of the Cabinet Mentri² Besar
Chief Ministers of Penang and Malacca Assistant Ministers Panglima Mangku Negara Representatives of the States

Representatives of Foreign Governments Commonwealth Service Commanders Judges of Appeal and Judges of the Supreme Court Members of the Dewan Negara Johan Mangku Negara Members of the Dewan Ra’ayat Members of the Public Services of Superscale Grade Heads of Religious Denominations Second Division of the Sovereign’s Escort provided by 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment
As the Royal Coffin mounted on the Gun Carriage was drawn away from the porch of Istana Negara and moved slowly down the drive into Taylor Road the first round of a 64-gun salute was fired by 1st Field Battery, at Bluff Road, representing the age of His Late Majesty. The salute continued at intervals during the procession and the last round was fired as the Royal Train moved out of Kuala Lumpur Station on its journey to Seremban.

When the Funeral Procession had stretched its full length along Victory Avenue and was approaching the Railway Station, aircraft of the Royal Malayan Air Force and the Commonwealth Air Forces flew over it in salute.

Before the head of the procession reached the Station Their Highnesses the Rulers and the four Undang of Negri Sembilan drove from the Istana, entered the Station and waited in a private room until the Coffin arrived. The Grand Chamberlain, as leader of the Royal Cortege, entered the Station gate near the Cenotaph and moved on to Platform One, while the main body of troons wheeled to the left down Cenotaph Road.

The Royal Train was already drawn up on Platform One. In the centre, opposite the Station Master’s office, stood the Royal Hearse Coach and in front of it a flat truck on which the Royal Coffin would be placed before sliding it on to a dais in the shelter of the coach. The Royal Coat-of-Arms was mounted on the front of the Diesel Electric Locomotive and on both sides of the coach in which the Royal Coffin would rest. The inside of the Hearse Coach was draped in yellow satin, and it was painted black and white on the outside. A Guard of Honour of 3 officers and 100 men of 5th Battalion Royal Malay Regiment was already drawn up opposite the Hearse coach with colours draped in black. Beside them were the Royal Nobat of Kedah, seated on a low wooden stage. Space was reserved for Their Highnesses the Rulers and their Consorts and all the principal mourners who followed the procession on Platform One, while a small section of the vast concourse which encircled the Railway Station filled Platform Three.

As soon as the principal mourners had taken up their positions at various points on Platform One the gun carriage was drawn along the platform to the sound of the Nobat’s deep drums and shrill clarionet until it stood opposite the flat truck, the five drummers from 5th Royal Malay still beating impeccable slow time in front. The Guard of Honour then gave a Royal Salute, which was maintained until the coffin had been placed in the Hearse Coach by the Coffin Bearers.

Her Majesty, members of the Royal Family, His Highness the Sultan of Brunei, the Prime Minister, Deputy
Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Pall Bearers, Insignia Bearers, the Grand Chamberlain and Muslim Religious officials entered the train and the electric motor of the locomotive was quietly started; the Mufti and Chief Kathi of Negri Sembilan travelled in the Hearse Coach. A single blast of the locomotive syren was sounded, the Royal Nobat drummed for the last time in honour of His Late Majesty and the Guard of Honour gave a final salute, as the Royal Train drew slowly out of the Station on its journey to Seremban at 11.05 a.m. The Train travelling at an average speed of 28 m.p.h. covered the distance to Seremban in an hour and thirty seven minutes and arrived at 12.42 p.m.

The proceedings thereafter were the responsibility of the State Government.

On the morning of April 1st as soon as Tunku Besar Sri Menanti (Tunku Burhanuddin), uncle of his late Majesty, received news of his Majesty’s death, he sent one of the Orang Empat Istana to inform the Penghulu Luak Muar, who is regarded by tradition and custom as the Senior Penghulu of the Tanah Mengandong—(the others being the Dato Jempul, Dato Terachi and Dato Gunong Pasir). He in turn sent the four principal Lembaga of Luak Muar to inform the four Undang. Dato Paduka Besar was sent to Sungei Ujong (Seremban), Dato Orang Kaya Bongsu to Jelebu, Dato Sri Maharaja to Johol and Dato Senara Muda to Rembau. They travelled by private cars. At the Istana Sri Menanti, the Orang Empat Istana requested the Orang Enam Istana to set up the ‘Alat Kebesaran’ outside the palace on the grass lawn. The ‘Alat Kebesaran’ consisted of 16 yellow umbrellas.

16 spears with horse hair tufts attached to the shafts, 
16 long Kris and Swords, 
16 Pennons (8 yellow, 4 black and 4 red).

These remained in position, day and night, until the new Yang Di Pertuan Besar Negri Sembilan was proclaimed on April 5th. No. 1 Battery, Federation Artillery was summoned to Sri Menanti and fired a salute of 32 guns later in the morning.

Preparations for the Lying in State and Burial at Sri Menanti were set in motion and continued throughout Saturday April 2nd.

When the Royal Train arrived at Seremban Station on Sunday April 3rd the Yang Di Pertuan Agong’s Royal Standard and the Federation Flag had been removed and replaced by the Royal Standard of the Yang Di Pertuan Besar Negri Sembilan and the Negri Sembilan State Flag. The Coffin Bearers who had travelled on the train lifted the Coffin from the low truck and carried it out of the Station to a Federation Army vehicle which had been converted into a hearse and painted yellow and black. It was draped in yellow satin and the State Coat of Arms was mounted on the front and at both sides.

The Royal Coffin and principal Mourners were received at Seremban by the four Undang, Tunku Besar Tampin and Dato Shahbandar Sungei Ujong, the Mentri Besar and other high State Officials and unofficials and a Guard of Honour of 3 officers and 100 men of 6th Royal Malay Regiment. The Band of the Royal Malay Regiment played the State Anthem and a 21 gun salute was fired by the 1st Battery, Federation Artillery.

The procession from Seremban to Sri Menanti was by motor vehicle, and over 200 vehicles took part. His Highness the Sultan of Brunei, the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers returned to Kuala Lumpur by a special train as soon as the Royal Coffin had left Seremban Station. The Grand Chamberlain and the 6 Insignia Bearers accompanied the coffin to Sri Menanti.

The procession reached the Istana Besar Sri Menanti at about 3.10 p.m. and the coffin was carried by the Coffin Bearers into the Main Hall where a seven tiered platform shaded by a high canopy of yellow satin had been erected. The State Coat of Arms was placed on each of the four sides of the upper canopy. His Late Majesty’s State Regalia were arranged on a low table at the head of the coffin at floor level and his Orders and Decorations, displayed on velvet cushions, which had been carried in the procession, were placed on another low table at the foot of the coffin. The two large incense urns from the Istana Negara were brought to Sri Menanti and incense continued to smoulder in them at either end of the seven tiered platform as verses from the Koran, softly intoned, broke the stillness of

*The Royal Coffin in the Hearse Coach just before departure for Seremban. 3.4.60.*
many mourners’ sorrow. On both sides of the coffin 16 small boys sat on the carpeted floor tending lighted candles, arranged in lines of seven, 28 in all, and 3 large wreaths of Malayan flowers from Her Majesty, the Federation Government and the State Government stood in prominence on simple frames, while many others rested against the pillars and walls of the Great Hall. The vigil by officers of the Federation Armed Forces and the Royal Federation of Malaya Police continued.

Members of the public begun to file past the Royal Coffin as soon as the Chief Mourners had left the Hall and they continued in their hundreds till very late on Sunday night and from 9.00 a.m. till 10.00 p.m. on Monday April 4th.

The Royal Burial took place on the afternoon of Tuesday April 5th.

At 3.00 p.m. that day the senior of the 4 Undang, Dato Klana Sungei Ujong, proclaimed Tunku Munawir, eldest son of His Late Majesty, the new Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan in the Balai of the Istana, and he and the other Undang and lesser Chiefs made obeisance.

The Dato Klana of Sungei Ujong made two presentations, one of sireh in a gold box and the other a package containing $384/- representing 4 bahara of gold from each of the 4 Undang.

His Highness then read a short address and after a prayer recited by the Mufti of Negri Sembilan, he gave orders for the Royal Burial to proceed.

Outside the Istana on the broad grass lawn a detachment of 100 men of 6th Royal Malay Regiment and the Central Band of the Royal Malay Regiment were facing the entrance in brilliant sunshine.

The Coffin Bearers carried the coffin out to the waiting vehicle, which was given the traditional name of Maharaja di-Raja, a title originally applied to the litter on which the Royal Coffin was carried from the Istana to the grave. The yellow draped vehicle was drawn by ropes pulled by the 99 palace retainers (Pegawai 99). It was preceded by palace servants carrying the Alat Kebesaran and by the Penghulu Tanah Mengdong, and senior palace officials. Four palace officials took their seats on the Maharaja di-Raja before it moved away from the porch. The Royal umbrella bearer (Dato Panglima Gajah) and Dato Kanda Maharaja carrying the sword Sibaran Bujang on the right and Dato Mangku and Dato Mentri on the Left. The Orang Enam Istana and Apit Lempang walked on each side of the vehicle all dressed in black. As the vehicle was drawn down the drive the Guard of Honour presented arms and the Regimental Colour was dipped in salute while the Band played the State Anthem and the 1st Battery Federation Artillery fired a 64-gun salute at one minute intervals.
Behind the Maharaja di-Raja the main procession formed up on foot. It was headed by 6 Insignia Bearers followed by Her Majesty, the new Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan, the Putera Yang Empat (brothers and uncle of the new Ruler), the 4 Undang, the Tunku Besar Tampin and the Dato Shahbandar, the Sultan of Selangor, the Sultan of Kedah, the Raja of Perlis, the Sultan of Brunei and the Governors of Penang and Malacca; the Prime Minister, the Mentri Besar, Negri Sembilan, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Representatives of Commonwealth and foreign countries, the Chief Justice, the Speaker, Cabinet Ministers and the Mufti of Negri Sembilan. Following ancient custom the entire route from the palace to the royal mausoleum, a distance of over 300 yards, was covered by a continuous length of white cloth 42 inches wide, supported on scores of lightly built frames painted yellow and shaped like tall goal posts which stood 12 feet high straddling the road.

At the walled entrance to the Royal graveyard the coffin was lifted off the vehicle and carried by the Coffin Bearers for the last time through the white gateway to the grave side. Only the principal mourners could be admitted, and as they took up positions facing the grave, clouds swept quickly up from the horizon and covered the sun, and a cold wind blew down the green valley of Seri Menanti. While the coffin was being lowered into the

Coffin Bearers lowering the Royal Coffin into the grave at Seri Menanti. 5.4.60.

The Mufti of Negri Sembilan reads the final prayer after the grave has been filled. Tunku Ja'afar and Tunku Abdullah, sons of His Late Majesty, Her Majesty and H.H. the Timbalan Yang Di-Pertuan Agong stand facing the grave.

grave rain fell on the mourners who a few minutes earlier had suffered from the heat of the afternoon sun. Rain signifies a blessing (Berkat) and the sudden shower was an impressive and unforeseen conclusion to the long programme of carefully planned and faultlessly executed ceremonial in which so many men of all stations and ages had taken part. As the Mufti concluded the final grave side prayer, a party drawn from 6th Royal Malay fired 3 volleys in salute and the poignant notes of the Last Post from the Bugles of Malay soldiers echoed round the encircling hills in the gathering dusk.

Her Majesty the Raja Permaisuri Agong, H.H. the new Yang di-Pertuan Besar, Negri Sembilan, and his Consort in the procession to the grave side. 5.4.60.