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Penang a trove of sweet memories

The Star, Malaysia



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.



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

Stories by TAN SIN CHOW  
and IVAN LOH  
north@thestar.com.my

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 hawkers 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



(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



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.

ninth Yang di-Pertua Negri of Penang, succeeding Tun Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak.

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 menteri 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.