

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **PROFESSOR GERARD T. WRIXON**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, University College Cork - National University of Ireland, Cork on 18th June 2003, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **HIS MAJESTY the Yang di-Pertuan Agong XII Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail, KING OF MALAYSIA**

Chancellor, Your Majesties, Lord Mayor, Ministers, Ambassadors, Members of the University and Guests:

There have been many ties between Ireland and Malaysia over recent centuries and this visit by His Majesty is a fitting testament to the depth of our bonds. Perhaps the most remarkable has been the exponential growth in trade between us in the past decade. Exports to Malaysia climbed to almost 2 billion euros in 2001, making Malaysia Ireland's 3rd most important non-European market. However, it is in the field of education that our relationship has been deepest and long-standing. Since the establishment of the first school in 1852, the most sustained Irish contribution was made by generations of nuns and brothers who established schools and hospitals throughout Malaysia. Countless Malaysians recall, fondly, their years in schools staffed by Irish members of the La Salle Order, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, the Mill Hill Fathers and the Order of the Holy Infant Jesus. The institutions they founded empowered the young people of Malaysia, helped unlock their talents and provided the opportunities through which their lives would be fulfilled.

The names of some Irishmen who made notable contributions to Malaysian culture stand out: William Marsden wrote a Malay grammar and dictionary in the early years of the 19th century; in the 1930s, William Linehan published a history of the State of Pahang; in more recent times, Mubin Shephard was a co-founder of the National Museum of Malaysia and Victor Hutson helped establish the National Zoo in Kuala Lumpur.

Just like his father before him, His Majesty The Yang di-Pertuan Agong XII is deeply respected by the people of Malaysia. He bears with distinction the responsibilities of his high office and he is admired for his modesty and humility. He has made a point of reaching out to all Malaysians in important areas of their daily life.

Born on 17th May 1943 during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail spent his early years in Arau. At the age of seven he left for Penang to continue his education at the Wellesley Primary School and later, in 1956, at the Penang Free School. In 1959, together with his brother, he left by boat from Penang for the United Kingdom, where he completed his formal education in 1963 at Wellingborough Public School.

On 30th October 1960, he was conferred with the title of 'His Royal Highness, Crown Prince of Perlis'.

Following the tradition of most royal houses, he underwent the officer cadet course at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Upon completing his training, he returned to Malaysia and joined the Ministry of Defence as Second Lieutenant in the Malaysian Reconnaissance Corps. He first served in Pahang, followed by a transfer to Sabah in 1966, and to Sarawak in 1967. In 1969 he resigned from the army to concentrate on affairs of state in Perlis.

His Majesty was officially proclaimed the seventh Raja of Perlis on 17th April 2000, the day after the death of his father. He was also appointed Colonel-in-Chief of the Malaysian Royal Rangers.

In December 2001, he took the oath as the 12th Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia. In his official role he carries out his duties with complete dignity and decorum, upholding the precept that “only a just ruler enters paradise”. Within a few weeks of his taking office, he celebrated Aidil Fitri (the end of the fasting month of Ramadan) in December 2001, with the people in Johor Baru. He also sent off the first batch of pilgrims to Mecca. Recognising the multi-cultural nature of Malaysia, he celebrated Chinese New Year with Chinese Malaysians in Ipoh in February 2002.

His Majesty takes great interest in the education of his people. In 1986, he was elected Chairman of the Tuanku Syed Putra Foundation, an organisation formed to assist students in Perlis to further their studies in institutions of higher learning, both locally and abroad. He is Chancellor of the University of Technology MARA, which has 93,000 students in 14 campuses across Malaysia

In honouring His Majesty today we also pay tribute to the achievements of Malaysia and its recognition of the vital importance of education to economic and social development. Although a young country, formed in 1957, Malaysia is ambitious. It has set the formidable target of achieving First World economic status by 2020 and has made many sacrifices to develop world-class communications and technological infrastructure. Above all, it is making extraordinary investment in new schools, colleges and universities. While developing this domestic capacity it has also recognised the critical importance of educating its brightest students, albeit at enormous expense, at the best universities internationally. Here, Ireland has played a prominent role.

While many Irish citizens have devoted their lives to teaching in Malaysia, Ireland has also been a favoured destination for Malaysians wishing to further their education in an English-speaking environment overseas, predominantly in the study of Medicine. At present, there are over 1000 Malaysians in Irish universities and colleges. Our two countries have recently signed a Memorandum on Co-operation in the Field of Education which sets the scene for future alliances and may expand exchanges in other disciplines such as Engineering and Information Technologies.

Attendance at Irish universities has given generations of Malaysians a lifelong connection with Ireland and they have earned a deserved reputation, in Ireland, as excellent students. We are grateful to the Malaysian Government for entrusting so many young Malaysians to our Universities and Colleges. I am sure that our students from Malaysia would wish to be associated with this celebration here today, and its symbolic significance of highlighting the important educational developments between our two countries. Malaysian students are first-class ambassadors for their homeland and their presence enriches our own increasingly multi-ethnic society.

UCC is particularly pleased that His Majesty has decided to include a visit to Cork in the itinerary of his State Visit, for the conferment of this honorary degree by the National University of Ireland.

Chancellor, I present to you, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, his Majesty the King of Malaysia, ruler of a country with deep historical links with Ireland, and which shares with us a commitment to excellence in Education.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totique Academiae.