

Flooded with cries of help

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WE can't really be planning for after the floods, yet. While it is receding in some states, in others, it is either brewing or a second coming is on the way.

Even as I write, the sky outside the office is dark and a thunderstorm looks likely.

The weather has been like this for a while now. It could be the melting polar ice caps, or the El Nino, or a quirk in the global weather system, but the monsoon has been with us for a long period this time around.

On a personal level, the rain has been a blessing, most of the time. The days are cooler, and we are saving electricity by not having to switch on the air-conditioner at night.

Here, in Kuala Lumpur, my house happens to be on a higher plane, and save for Armageddon, the chance of it being flooded is very slim, indeed.

Except for the occasional wet newspapers on my driveway in the morning, my personal well-being has not been affected, and I am able to do what I normally do.

Herein, I suppose, lies the problem. Most of us who keep an eye on government, business and the media are in areas untouched by the floods.

The fact that it has taken the lives of some of our fellow citizens, and made millions miserable, is just news delivered to our breakfast tables and living rooms.

All I am concerned about, callous and insensitive it may be, is the need to talk to the newspaper vendor about not getting my newspapers wet.

In the news business it is called the "proximity" element — the closer I am with an issue, the more concerned I will be.

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We care less about the Adam Air crash in Indonesia, because it is far away, but not too far away for us not to care at all. We would, however, care more if there were Malaysians involved, or if some VIPs or famous personalities were on board the ill-fated plane.

Also, some Muslims might care more about what happens in Palestine because fellow Muslims are being persecuted, while those in the United States, for example, might look at the situation as security issues for Israel.

The bombings in Baghdad, we have stopped caring. While some might worry about what's in store for Datuk Siti Nurhaliza or Mawi in 2007, yet others might scan the pages for what's new in Bollywood.

Our proximity and interest define our involvements, as is the situation with the floods for many of us. Should we just be concerned about rising vegetable prices?

Could we be more concerned about the floods, and



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the way we deal with it? Or could our understanding of the situation be better, if people who matter in government, business and, of course, the media, were to be directly affected by it?

If a tree falls in my neighbourhood and blocks the access road to my home, it would make a world of a difference to me, while for the rest of the

country, it would probably not matter an iota.

Ideally, I should have driven south to look at the situation myself before attempting to write about the floods. But that is too much work, and I rely on the media to tell me how bad it is.

While we empathise with those whose lives have been dislocated by the rising wa-

ters, we cannot even begin to appreciate their problems until we see our mattresses and crockery floating in our living rooms.

I am sure if the urban centres, especially Kuala Lumpur, were to be flooded, there would be more publicity and help. Notice the attention given by government, businesses and the media on the flooding

of Shah Alam a while ago.

This is also the biggest flood we have seen for a long time. It is dangerous, and it is not about to end, yet. Some villages were completely submerged under water.

Millions of our fellow citizens were affected. Even if we are not affected by it, we should all come together and help in any way we can.