

# Have proper plan to tackle floods, says Sultan of Selangor

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**PETALING JAYA:** The Sultan of Selangor has called for a comprehensive action plan to tackle floods in the state, saying piecemeal actions are no longer effective as rain patterns grew more unpredictable.

Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah also suggested that the state government set up a disaster fund where money could be drawn down to provide immediate assistance to victims.

He added that he was saddened when victims of flood, fires or other tragedies were further burdened by financial difficulties after losing their houses or worse, their loved ones.

The Sultan had started drawing attention to the need for a thorough anti-flood masterplan in Selangor following the big floods in Johor in 2006 and 2007.

"I have written many letters concerning my worry. I call them 'love letters'.

"I wrote to the former and current Prime Minister. I also wrote to the Selangor Menteri Besar.

"I will not keep quiet. As Sultan, I can advise, I can warn, but I cannot force them to do anything. I know where my limit is," said Sultan Sharafuddin in an interview ahead of his 66th birthday tomorrow.

This year also marks the Sultan's 10th year of reign.

The Tuanku said it was crucial Selangor and Klang Valley have proper anti-flood plans and proper drainage and irrigation systems.

"We must be serious in this matter," he said.

Sultan Sharafuddin said the public must also play their part by not throwing rubbish into drains.

Clogged drains have been identified as one of the contributing factors to flash floods.

Initial studies showed last month's Kajang floods were caused by the narrow monsoon drains which were filled with rubbish.

On the next general election, Sultan Sharafuddin warned against anyone using his name, or the palace, to gain mileage.

"Do not drag me into politics. Yes, it happens.

"Before this, the palace was more diplomatic. Now, I will openly tell them no. I will go after them," warned the Tuanku.

As head of the state, Sultan Sharafuddin said he maintained a neutral stand and was

above politics.

"I do not vote. In fact, I have never voted. Let the rakyat choose who they want," he said.

"Despite some quarters saying I am on the side of a political party, I assure you that I am not. I remain apolitical."

The Tuanku also disapproved of politicians who created "sparks that ignite tension".

"In my visits to the ground, I am happy when my rakyat tells me they are fine with each other.

"Politicians must not create unnecessary problems in trying to be champions," he said.



Interview with the Sultan  
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# A Sultan's many challenges

## Ruler admits it has been a stormy year and hopes next year will be better

SULTAN of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah strode into the meeting room at his office in Concorde Hotel, looking rushed. He apologised for being late.

The humble Ruler had just come straight from another appointment and would be having several more later in the evening.

Tuanku's car had been caught in a traffic jam as he travelled without outriders, said an aide.

The Sultan does not use outriders unless it is for official functions.

Looking smart in a blue jacket with a matching white shirt with stripes and a pair of jeans, Sultan Sharafuddin tells **WONG CHUN WAI** and **LOONG MENG YEE** that the challenges never stop, and neither will he.

**Q: Tuanku, many say the year has rushed past. How has yours been?**

A: It has been a stressful year. From day one (starting January) there were issues. There was the controversy surrounding the appointment of the state secretary, followed by the calling for an emergency state assembly sitting. Then, there was the matter with the church and Jais, and also the misuse of mosques to preach politics. The whole year, I did not feel calm. There has been a lot of thinking, a lot of reading and reflecting on how to solve these issues. My main concern is to ensure all races live harmoniously in Selangor. It has been a stormy year indeed. I hope next year will be more peaceful.

**Q: What are Tuanku's plans for next year?**

A: Well, the general election is expected. I will



**Heart to heart:** Wong interviewing Sultan Sharafuddin at his office in Concorde Hotel.

have no part in that. I do not vote. In fact, I have never voted. Let the rakyat decide whom they want. Next year, I want to publish books – four or five of them. They will mostly be coffee table types with many pictures. They will be about the state mosque, old maps, sailing around the world and on the procedures involved for the state awards – information such as how many awards are given out each year, in what category and how the awards revoked will be documented. I do not want the rakyat to think that I can just pull back the

awards any time, like a threat. There are procedures to follow.

**Q: Your royal decision not to involve the courts in the controversy surrounding the operation by the State Islamic Religious Department (Jais) on a thanksgiving dinner held at the Damansara Utama Methodist Church in August reflected your wish for inter-religion harmony?**

A: When the news was splashed across the

media, I initially assumed it was Jais raiding a church where the congregation was in the midst of prayers. I was very worried about the possibility of a religious clash erupting. I went through May 13 (1969). I had only been Raja Muda for a year-and-a-half at that time and my father (the late Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah) was away. I was shocked and did not know what to do, I was literally just thrown into the deep end. Thankfully, I could communicate with the elders. We thank God we solved the problem quite fast, but we cannot let that happen again. For the Jais issue, after consulting the legal department and religious authorities, I called for no court case – to avoid the matter getting dragged on for years without closure. Whatever the judge decides, one party will not be happy. So, I advised the Christians to be sensitive, you follow your religion and similarly we do the same with ours. To Jais, I told them to strictly adhere to procedures and conduct themselves in the right manner. For such situations in the future, I advised them to engage retired police officers with expertise in people skills. We should respect each other's religion. Do not interfere. You pray your way, I pray mine. I am sure God will know.

**Q: Tuanku, how do you maintain your position as the Sultan in a state where the opposing sides of the political coalitions are seen as equally strong?**

A: It is very difficult. I am neutral but I am accused of being biased. Certain parties also



# Sultan: Keep politics out of mosques

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claim my private secretary or the Istana are partial. This hurts me. When my statements point out the ruling state government has erred, some of their supporters claim Barisan Nasional is teaching me. And when I extended help to the state government, that does not mean I am on Pakatan Rakyat's side. I just want to solve problems faced by the *rakyat*. My decisions are in the interest of the *rakyat*. History will tell one day.

**Q: What advice does Tuanku have for the elected representatives?**

A: In my visits to the ground, I am happy when the *rakyat* tell me they are fine with each other. Sad to say, it's politics that ignite tension. Politicians must not create unnecessary problems in trying to be champions. This has happened too many times. Politicians know what is the right thing to do but some do not care. There is too much politicking at the expense of the *rakyat*. As the head of Islam in Selangor, it is my wish that politics be kept out of mosques. Many have complained to me about sermons in some mosques. For the first four or five minutes, the talk is about religion, but after that it veers into politics. I have suggested that those who want to gather, go ahead and do it at the stadium. Then, during prayer time, put aside differences and go



**I cannot neglect my duty to the rakyat and the state. I have to honour my father's wish. He told me to take care of the state well. The day I cannot fulfil this duty will be the day I step down.**

— SULTAN SHARAFUDDIN IDRIS SHAH

pray as brothers and sisters in the mosque. But no, they still insist on holding *ceramah* in mosques. They also want to go to stadiums to gather and later, pray there as well. I feel sad. The stadium is a place for concerts and sports, it is not suitable for prayers. I believe very much that politics and religion cannot mix. Among Muslims, it creates a split. Among other religions, even worse, it can cause clashes.

**Q: Tuanku has always been selective when conferring awards. Selangor is known to be strict with its Datukships.**

A: The titles must be earned. Only

deserving candidates will be selected after a stringent vetting process. No such thing as conferring Datukships on young ones aged 21 or 22. Having said that, I will be honouring 30 people this year, as this year is a special occasion. However, the number of titles given is still below the quota of 40 that I had set previously.

**Q: Do the rakyat continue to write letters to Tuanku?**

A: Yes, many letters on all kinds of issues. A major recurring theme is the dissatisfaction with some parties using mosques to preach politics. Other matters brought to my attention include complaints about the slow dispense of justice at the syariah courts and land issues. Before this, they wrote without leaving their names. Nowadays, they include their identities and even handphone numbers. One letter from a lady touched me. She said her divorce hearing at the syariah court had been dragging on for seven years. This is unfair to her because it hinders her chances of remarrying. Judges must use their conscience when making decisions. Also, they should finish hearing cases within a reasonable time. There have been complaints that divorce and distribution of wealth cases in the syariah courts were delayed due to petty reasons. This cannot be allowed to continue.

**Q: Tuanku, for your 66th birthday this year, you will unveil a special project that you have worked on for six years. Can you tell us more about it?**

A: When the previous government wanted to announce Selangor Maju in 2005, they wanted to build a monument to commemorate the state achieving its developed status. I disagreed. I learnt a lesson from my father's 25th anniversary of reign. They constructed a gigantic steel keris monument in Klang. It is beautiful, but did it serve the rakyat? I told the state leaders if they wanted to, then build the best library in the country. That marked the birth of the Raja Tun Uda library in Shah Alam. It will be a five-storey beautiful structure on a 60-acre piece of land. Many big guns want the land for development, but a library it will be. The concept follows the best libraries in the world. There will be a lot of natural light, a lot of space for every generation – the children, the parents, the grandparents. Instead of lingering in supermarkets, come *lepak* (hang around) here. The library will be open on weekends as well.

**Q: It is said that Tuanku will personally donate books to kick-start the collection there. So how is that going?**

A: Yes, I will contribute 1,300 books on leadership, military, sports,

music, art and business. The delivery of books will be in batches until March because they are slow in coming from the publishers abroad. These are books that will fire the imagination of the people and inspire them. Others who wish to do the same are welcomed. For contributions of books more than RM100,000, a plaque bearing the donor's name will be put up. In return, I urge my *rakyat* to also share in the love for books. Bring your family to the library, borrow the books, but do take care of the books for the next generation. Do not damage or spoil them.

**Q: This birthday is extra special because this year also celebrates Tuanku's 10th year of reign.**

A: Nov 22 marked my 10 years as Sultan of Selangor. The other day, I was sitting alone and I started reflecting on what I had done and what I had gone through. There have been many, many challenges to overcome. However, one thing remains the same. I wish to see my *rakyat* living in harmony and have a better quality of life. There is no point in Selangor becoming a developed state but people cannot live comfortable lives because of friction. I cannot neglect my duty to the rakyat and the state. I have to honour my father's wish. He told me to take care of the state well. The day I cannot fulfil this duty will be the day I step down.