

Weather forecast makes year-end polls 'unlikely'

HEAVY rains, now almost a daily affair in many parts of the country, are a clear indication that the annual monsoon season is upon us.

On Monday, more than 4,000 people were evacuated in Johor, Selangor, Perak and Malacca as floodwaters rose to dangerous levels. This number will likely increase in the coming weeks.

According to the Meteorological Department, the northeast monsoon this year will be "normal", with episodes of heavy rains in the east coast and south of the peninsula, coastal areas of Sarawak and Sabah's east coast, lasting between two and three days.

"In extreme weather cases, episodes of heavy rain can last up to

three to eight days which could result in flooding," the department said in its Monsoon Season Report.

Last year, more than 16,000 people were evacuated from flood-hit areas nationwide during the year-end monsoon, which saw episodes of heavy rainfall between November last year and January this year.

The weatherman expects this year's monsoon season to last until early March next year.

This is good to know. For starters, everyone should have an umbrella or raincoat in their vehicles when travelling from now on,

if they haven't done so already.

Those in flood-prone areas should start taking precautions to keep important documents in waterproof containers that are easily accessible in case of evacuations.

Emergency numbers for the police or flood operation centres should also be displayed prominently in their homes to call for help when floodwaters rise.

Wedding planners for couples looking to tie the knot during the year-end school holidays also need to take the wet weather into consideration.

Canopies for guests must be wind-

and rain-proof, located on higher ground, and have plenty of wooden planks (for makeshift walkways) and umbrellas on stand-by to prevent the rain from dampening festivities.

The police, army and volunteer groups are already on alert mode for flood relief work, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said on Monday.

Food has also been stockpiled to be dispersed to people displaced by floods, he added.

For some political pundits, meanwhile, the weatherman's forecast may have sealed the deal as far as the date for the 13th general election is concerned, on several counts.

Schools and community halls

used as polling centres will be occupied as relief centres for the thousands of flood victims evacuated during the monsoon season.

The resources of the police and other law-enforcement personnel could be stretched too thin if they have to handle both the floods and nationwide polls simultaneously.

Voter turnout could also be adversely affected if polls are held during the monsoon season.

The only time Malaysia's general election was held at this time of the year was in 1999, on Nov 29. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Stockholm, voter turnout that year was 68.65 per cent.

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