

## **Johor's sultan sets aside Wednesdays for state officials to brief him, in unusual move**

**The Straits Times**

**OCTOBER 4, 2017**

JOHOR BARU - Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar of Johor has set aside Wednesdays as an "Open Day" for state officials to brief him on developments in the state, an unusual step by a member of Malaysia's royalty which mainly serve a ceremonial role .

An update on the ruler's Facebook said the move will "ensure development projects by the Johor state government and its agencies truly benefit the people".

The ruler on Wednesday (Oct 4) met with several top state officials in the first of such meetings, including Johor's Menteri Besar Mohamed Khaled Nordin.

This inaugural meeting was held at an office located within the grounds of Istana Bukit Pelangi in the state capital of Johor Baru.

Sultan Ibrahim, 58, also met with president of the Council of Johor Royal Court Abdul Rahim Ramli, Johor Islamic Council adviser Noh Gadut, Mayor of Johor Baru A. Rahim Nin and Johor Public Works Department director Mohd Salleh Abu Bakar.

"At these meetings," stated the ruler's Facebook post, "Sultan Ibrahim will go through various documents and/or presentations given to him, especially those relating to development programmes and initiatives for the people."

His Majesty's post included several pictures of the meeting .

The ruler's move could prove controversial if it is interpreted as meddling by Malaysian royalty in executive and political affairs.

Nine of Malaysia's 13 states have Malay hereditary rulers who serve as titular heads of state and take turns every five years to reign as the Malaysia's King, the Agong. The nine rulers are also heads of Islam in their respective states.

In 2014, ex-premier Tun Mahathir Mohamad and others spoke out when the Johor sultan tried to make changes to state housing rules that would empower the ruler to appoint four members to the state housing board.

Sultan Ibrahim of Johor has changed the official English form of address for him from "His Royal Highness" to "His Majesty".

#### Related Story

Johor Sultan decrees he is to be addressed as 'His Majesty' in English from 'His Royal Highness'

The Johor Housing and Real Property Board Bill 2014, would have allowed Sultan Ibrahim to appoint the committee members, decide how much they are paid and oversee the board's accounts, among other powers.

Dr Mahathir, who was then a supporter of the government led by Prime Minister Najib Razak, had written in his blog then that he feared that the Johor menteri besar (chief minister) would be pressured to take the palace's orders on housing matters if the bill was passed.

"The rulers are to be paid handsome pensions and may not be involved in business. This was considered necessary because officers tend to defer to the wishes of rulers and would find difficulty in rejecting business propositions by them," Dr Mahathir wrote then.

A watered down version of the Bill was later passed by the Johor state assembly.

It said the monarch would act on the advice of the menteri besar. And every reference to the ruler in the Bill was changed to the words "the authorities".

Malaysia's federal Cabinet and the 13 state cabinets have their weekly meetings every Wednesday morning.

The Prime Minister also meets the Malaysian King on Wednesdays to update him on national issues including what the federal cabinet discussed.

Among the nine Malay rulers, Johor's Sultan Ibrahim is the most vocal, issuing statements and comments on the country's political affairs.

Malaysia has strict lese majeste laws with police often detaining citizens who post what are seen as offensive comments against royalty.

**SPH Digital News / Copyright © 2017 Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. Co. Regn. No. 198402868E. All rights reserved**

Source: <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/johors-sultan-sets-aside-wednesdays-for-state-officials-to-brief-him-in-unusual-move>