

ORDINARILY, a man picking up trash is hardly an attention-grabbing scene. But for motorists driving along Seremban's Jalan Tuanku Munawir, a billboard featuring a man doing just that has been causing double takes.

Clad in a short-sleeved T-shirt and fedora and wielding a garbage picker, the man pictured in the billboard is none other than the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan Tuanku Muhriz Tuanku Munawir.

Those present on the day the image was captured will attest to the fact that the picture was neither a photo opportunity nor publicity stunt.

The candid photo was taken shortly after the launch of the state-level World Cleanup Day and Negri Sembilan Bersih (A Clean Negri Sembilan) campaign at the Lake Gardens here last September.

The Ruler, who was scheduled to partake in refreshments at a nearby hotel after the launch, caught everyone off-guard when he set protocol aside to participate in clean-up efforts at the Seremban main market.

Armed with garbage pickers, Tuanku Muhriz and his sons Tunku Ali Redhaudhin and Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin helped out in the sprucing-up exercise organised by the state government and Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWM).

While doing his part, the Ruler also paused to chat with shoppers, and more importantly, to offer motivation to those involved in the clean-up project.

Leading by example comes naturally to Tuanku Muhriz, who celebrates his 73rd birthday today.

Tuanku Muhriz is quite accustomed to rolling up his sleeves for community causes – a practice that dates back to his days as the international service director of the Rotary Club Kuala Lumpur Diraja.

During the conditional movement control order last year, when the state's blood bank's supply was running dangerously low, Tuanku Muhriz was among the first to respond to calls to replenish the stock.

A blood donation drive was held at Istana Hinggap in Seremban, with the Ruler and palace staff donating blood in aid of the urgent cause.

True to his mantra of walking the talk, Tuanku Muhriz started the ball rolling by volunteering to donate blood himself before urging his subjects to do the same.

Tuanku Muhriz's humble gesture drew attention to the importance of donating blood to replenish the blood bank's supply and save lives.

Tuanku Muhriz also paid tribute to those involved in the fight against Covid-19, and commended all Malaysians for proving they were able to cooperate and help each other, irrespective of race and religion.

"I am truly amazed and at the same time, value the dedication of all frontliners as well as those behind the scenes who are fighting the virus.

"I am also proud of the commitment shown by the rakyat where many have served as volunteers during this period and helped out in many ways," Tuanku Muhriz said when opening the state assembly meeting last May.

Education and community health have always been priorities for Tuanku Muhriz, who is also Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) chancellor and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh – an honour bestowed upon Tuanku Muhriz for his untiring efforts to advance medical care for the less fortunate.

Yamtuan walks the talk

“With Tuanku, it's not just lip service. You know that he has his ear to the ground and ardently follows current issues be it politics, social problems or the environment.”

Datuk Dr Kirthi Jeyarajah

As the Yang di-Pertuan Besar, Tuanku Muhriz is naturally the royal patron of many organisations in the state. But rather than remain an observer, the ruler has made it a point to take an active interest in the various non-profits and clubs he patronises.

Malaysian Red Crescent Society (MRCS) state chapter deputy chairman Ramesh Patel, who has had the pleasure of working with Tuanku Muhriz during several MRCS events, said the Ruler kept himself updated with the society's activities and enjoyed engaging with members.

"When our branch hosted a national level medical camp for youth several years ago, Tuanku not only graced the event, but participated in our activities alongside our youth members.

"Just like everyone else attending the camp, Tuanku followed a CPR demonstration and later practised what he had learnt in a mock resuscitation activity," he said.

Warm and caring

Ramesh said Tuanku Muhriz was often accompanied to events by his consort Tunku Ampuan Besar Negri Sembilan Tuanku Aishah Rohani, who shared the Ruler's interest in causes that served the rakyat.

"Over the years, Tuanku has graciously allowed us to hold our annual MRCS NS awards ceremony at Istana Hinggap," he said.

"Tuanku is jovial and very knowledgeable, and topmost of his priorities is the younger generation."

The Ruler is also the royal patron of CMH Specialist Hospital (formerly NS Chinese Maternity Hospital) in Seremban.

On a visit to the hospital's dialysis centre, which provides subsidised treatment for needy patients, the Ruler and his consort took the time to speak to patients undergoing dialysis and give them words of encouragement.

One patient, Gan Kean Ling, when met, remembers being pleasantly surprised when Tuanku Muhriz dropped in.

The grandfather from Temiang here said the visit boosted his morale as it was tiring to undergo dialysis for hours at a time three times a week.

"Tuanku offered his support and presented us with gifts," he said, adding that he was touched by the ruler's warmth and genuine concern for his subjects.

His sentiments were echoed by residents of Kampung Semarak and Kampung Datuk Mansor here after Tuanku Muhriz and his sons made an impromptu stop to personally inspect damages caused by flash floods last November.

The royals, dressed casually in



Tuanku Muhriz using a rubbish picker to help in the clean-up exercise at the Seremban main market, in September last year.

T-shirts and slacks, took their time to go house to house and chat with villagers to check on their well-being and give out cash assistance.

Resident Asiah Mohd Salleh said she was surprised when Tuanku Muhriz walked into her home unannounced to enquire after her family's well-being and to assess the impact of the flood.

"Tuanku was very friendly and enquired about our well-being. He even asked if we had managed to save our pets," she said.

Tuanku Muhriz's involvement in charitable initiatives today is just an extension of the good work that he had actively pursued and carried out during his younger years.

Giving support to various community projects

As the royal patron of Rotary Club Seremban and Rotary Club Senawang, the Ruler continues to lend his support to various projects that benefit the community.

Rotary Club Senawang adviser Datuk Dr Kirthi Jeyarajah recalls Tuanku Muhriz's words to Rotarians during their last catch-up with the Ruler.

"With Tuanku, it's not just lip service. You know that he has his ear to the ground and ardently follows current issues be it politics, social problems or the environment.

"After visiting the victims of last November's floods, Tuanku suggested that we put together presentations for schools to educate students on the effects of indiscriminate littering," he said.

Since becoming the club's royal patron in 2009, Tuanku Muhriz has also participated in the club's events, attending everything from campaign launches to the annual installation of committee members.

Dr Kirthi said the ruler had only excused himself once since assuming the role of the club's royal patron.

"Tuanku has not turned down a single invitation over the years. He is always there to lend his support.

"Even for the one event which was a district Interact conference that Tuanku couldn't attend, he sent his two princes as representatives," he said emphasising the ruler's commitment to service.

Dr Kirthi and his fellow club advisers, who meet with Tuanku Muhriz regularly to update the ruler on the club's programmes and seek advice on club-related issues, know first-hand how deeply

passionate the Ruler is when it comes to service.

During their sessions, the Ruler often highlights issues faced by the community and discusses ways in which the club can address and find solutions for these problems.

The issues broached range from caring for the environment to bullying in schools.

"Tuanku's support is not about just cutting ribbons at launches. If Tuanku hears that we are raising funds for a good cause, Tuanku would be the first person to contribute.

"I remember when we needed money to purchase a van for Hospice Seremban a few years back. Tuanku immediately contributed RM10,000 via Yayasan Munarah."

Lending a helping hand to the underprivileged

Yayasan Munarah – a foundation to help the underprivileged – was among the first charitable initiatives set up by the Negri Sembilan royal family several months after Tuanku Muhriz ascended the throne a little over a decade ago.

The foundation was named in honour of the ruler's parents Tuanku Munawir Tuanku Abdul Rahman – the ninth ruler of Negri Sembilan who reigned from 1960-67, and his consort Tuanku Ampuan Durah Tuanku Besar Burhanuddin.

To date, Yayasan Munarah has reached out to thousands of people in need and disbursed over RM7mil in aid.

Among the recipients whose dreams were achieved with assistance from the foundation is Dr Shamini Subramaniam, currently a houseman at Hospital Segamat.

Despite obtaining excellent results during her matriculation at a government college in Kuala Pilah, the daughter of a lorry driver father and a rubber tapper mother was offered a seat in zoology at a local university instead of her first choice – medicine.

The young woman had almost given up on her hopes of becoming a doctor, but thanks to a timely intervention by Yayasan Munarah, she was able to pursue her passion.

The foundation helped her secure a place in a local medical school, and financed half the cost of her studies (the other half was funded with a National Higher Education Fund loan), as well as paid for her books and other expenditure.

Besides providing financial aid to deserving students, Yayasan Munarah has also organised pre-examination workshops, remedial camps for the hard-core poor, and supported causes related to special needs children.

The foundation's work is not just limited to helping the needy.

Causes also include environmental issues and the promotion of culture and the arts – subjects that are equally important to Tuanku Muhriz.

The Ruler, whose second prince Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin is a trustee of the Chopin Society of Malaysia, enjoys attending classical music recitals and winding down to tunes from his favourite artists – Elvis Presley, The Beatles and Cliff Richard.

Passion for music

Tuanku Muhriz's love for music was fostered during his school days at the Aldenham School in England, where he led a band cheekily dubbed The Prince and the Paupers.

But while strumming his guitar brings him great joy, the Ruler is a steadfast believer of duty above all else.

A just leader whose legal training instilled in him values such as fairness, integrity and accountability, Tuanku Muhriz often espouses that Malaysians are capable of thinking critically and rationally to uphold peace and security in the country, which was hard-won.

The Ruler reiterated his thoughts at the investiture ceremony for state honours last year.

"In fact, the sovereignty of the country wasn't achieved easily. Appreciation should be given to all national fighters and security forces who had shed sweat, tears and blood, for the sovereignty and security of this country.

"The people here are made up of many different races, religions and cultures. Be careful in what we strive and fight for, do not forget the values of the people and the sensitivity of other races," Tuanku Muhriz said, adding that a key to maintaining unity and harmony was to encourage the younger generation to mix and mingle with peers of various races.

At a time when most of us are too quick to judge our neighbours and ever ready to pass sentences without attempting to seek the truth, those words from a wise and caring Ruler are ones we should take to heart.