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Celebrating 25 years of achievement

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A QUARTER of a century of marriage is always an occasion for rejoicing, celebration and thanksgiving, given the fact that most people see their lives in the perspective view of a century.

The 25-year-old bond between the people of Kuala Lumpur and the city was celebrated with a public holiday on Saturday albeit, without much fanfare because of the fasting month.

Although there was an overt display of festivities, the significance of the occasion was in no way lost especially on those city denizens who have watched it grow into maturity.

City Hall has promised a host of activities after Hari Raya for city folk who have become used to the annual celebrations.

As in the silver jubilee of a marriage when the couple sits back and take stock of their lives, it may be prudent for city folk and the city fathers to do likewise.

Kuala Lumpur today is a far cry from the city of 1972 when it was little known and generally considered a poor cousin to its better known neighbours like Singapore, Bangkok and Jakarta.

As we move closer to the new millenium, the city can take pride in being ranked among the best in the region in terms of administration, facilities and standard of living.

Few can deny the fact that KL has developed by leaps and bounds into a bustling metropolis, the envy of many far and near.

For city folk, be they KL-born or "imports" from around the country who choose to make Kuala Lumpur their "kampung", there is no greater joy than being home.

Nevermind the garbage which sometimes fails to be collected, the perennial traffic jams which leaves little promise of improvement or the haze which many have come to accept as a part of life.

Kuala Lumpur continues to charm its people with its architecture, creature comforts and character.

The skyline is truly phenomenal. Twenty-five years ago who would have even imagined that Kuala Lumpur would have two 88-storey twin towers which light up the night sky daily like gargantuan Christmas trees or the stupendous viewing tower like the Menara KL which affords a bird's eye view of almost the entire city?

Could we have even have thought of the possibility of a massive construction like the KL Linear City being built along the river banks in the heart of the city?

Yet today all this is reality we can be proud of.

They are standing monuments that reflect the forward thinking capabilities of businessmen and the administration in the city.

That these projects have materialised is also testimony to the administrative prowess of our city fathers and the vision of national leaders like the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Bouquets could also go to the city administration headed by the Datuk Bandar Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman Sharif who have done well despite the challenge before them.

It is certainly not an easy matter looking after the needs and welfare of more than a million people, especially with the influx of foreigners both legal and illegal into the city.

They have placed an additional burden on City Hall which has to look

after squatter areas where many of the foreigners live.

It would not be wrong to say that KL is at a watershed today as what is planned now will generally determine the development and progress over the next 20 years.

This has to be seen in the context of the Vision 2020 concept which calls for a truly developed society by that date.

Some have stated in the recent past that KL lacks a soul despite the development it boasts.

Should we go the way of Singapore which is fast being seen as the centre for culture or should we let the popular culture of the day prevail?

The city fathers should ponder this question which is not altogether amiss.

All major cities in the world like New York, London or Tokyo have their own cultural attributes which are in themselves a drawing point for citizens and visitors.

Kuala Lumpur does not lack in culture.

There is a wealth of it in all major communities in the country.

Perhaps it is time for Kamaruzzaman and his team to give a helping hand to the people behind cultural activities, with proper facilities for theatre, music and art activities.

We could also host well-known groups or individuals from abroad who can add to the local cultural scene.

City Hall could seek the financial backing of the corporate sector which would be only too willing to help given the mileage corporations can gain from such non-profit making activities.

Of course, there is the question of transparency in administration and dealings with the public which some feel can be enhanced to mutual benefit.

While City Hall has endeavoured to liaise with people affected by projects in their neighbourhood, there is still room for improvement.

Taman Seputeh residents, for example, were recently wondering when a meeting would be held with Kamaruzzaman over the result of a traffic study involving the proposed development project in the area.

This was because an assurance was given sometime ago on the matter. But perhaps due to lack of communication between both parties, residents were left with questions in their minds.

An analysis of Kuala Lumpur's progress would not be complete without discussions of the growing traffic problems.

It has taken the likes of Dr Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to bring the matter to the fore recently after repeated public complaints of congestion in and around the city.

Kamaruzzaman, working in tandem with the Police and the Road Transport Department, should give priority to solving the city's traffic problem this year.

For many raised in KL in the 50s and 60s who themselves have families, the city has truly come of age.

The days of playing football in neighbourhood fields, catching fish in streams or flying kites in season maybe a thing of the past. But the joy of calling KL home is still the same as our hearts are here always.

Here's to another 25 years of growth, progress and prosperity in the Garden City of Lights.

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