

06/02/1997

Good, old and clean Petaling Jaya now only a memory

Harun Hashim

THIRTY years ago I came to live in Petaling Jaya. For years PJ had the reputation of being the cleanest town in Malaysia with the most efficient Town Council administration.

The streets were clean, the roads well maintained, the grass verge always cut, the drains cleaned and garbage collected regularly. A telephone call was sufficient to get the septic tank cleaned, for free. All these services were provided in return for the assessment rate paid to the council each year.

Alas not anymore. The council extended its boundaries and became a municipality. Cleaning of septic tanks was privatised at RM250 per visit. The assessment rate instead of being reduced was increased. Roads began to have pot holes. The maintenance people do not seem to exist. The ikut kiri signs on both sides of the roundabout leading to the Sri Aman Girls' Schools were broken three years ago and have yet to be replaced. THE garbage at the Old Town market spills over throughout the day. The monsoon drains beside the Dato Haji Kamaruddin mosque in Jalan 222 is filled with rubbish and stinks. The list can go on and on but let us say services have generally deteriorated. Perhaps now that Subang Jaya has been taken out of Majlis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya's (MPPJ's) responsibilities, Petaling Jaya may yet return to its former glory.

The new and permanent campus of the International Islamic University Malaysia is located in Gombak. It is a valley surrounded by hills and limestone cliffs. Rivers flow through the campus and retention ponds to prevent flooding add to the beauty and serenity of the place. It is an ideal setting for a seat of higher learning.

The centrepiece of the complex of buildings is the mosque which can accommodate 14,000 worshippers. From the mosque radiates other buildings to house the various faculties, law, economics and management science, engineering, education, Islamic Revealed knowledge and Human Sciences, the library and administration buildings all purposely designed to remind us that all knowledge is derived from Allah. The architecture is distinctly Islamic.

The university is fully residential with clusters of hostels on either side of the faculty buildings separating the male and female students. There are also separate sports and recreational facilities adjacent to the hostels.

Being an international university it has a sizeable foreign student population and foreign academic staff. It draws scholars and visiting dignitaries from far and near. Indeed the university is the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The approach road to this fine institution is like taking the back lane of a town. The campus is located off the 8th mile Gombak-Bentung road and is sandwiched between the old trunk road to Pahang and the Karak highway. Perhaps it is because of the existence of the highway that the old road has been more than somewhat neglected.

But that is not all. To get to the campus from Kuala Lumpur there are three possible routes, namely from Selayang through Batu Caves to Jalan Gombak or through Sentul to Jalan Gombak or from Setapak.

The first two routes are subject to traffic jams and so people prefer the Setapak route.

From the Setapak police station junction, Jalan Gombak is kept clean by

Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur until one crosses the boundary between the Federal Territory and Selangor. From there on heaps of rubbish dot the roadside all the way until one reaches the filthy junction leading to the campus.

The junction is water-logged, muddy with dilapidated huts. On Wednesdays it is the site of a pasar malam, and of course heaps of rubbish all over the place. From this point a beautiful newly constructed and surfaced road leads to the campus with street lights.

Soon after entering the road a signboard proclaims: Selamat Datang ke Indian Settlement, Gombak, Selangor D.E.

The residents of this settlement must have a wry sense of humour. The settlement consists of dilapidated coolie lines of bygone era of what was once a rubber plantation. Perhaps the powers that be should make this settlement a model village of Malaysians of Indian descent.

The Gombak District Council should take pride in having an international university in its district. Perhaps it could learn from the experience of MPPJ on how to cope with providing services when a local authority is entrusted with enlarged and increased responsibilities.

(END)