

13 JUL 2001

Special Report-KL Tower

THE SILENT TELECOMMUNICATION ADVANCES AT KL TOWER

By: Kuzaimah Idris

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) - The KL Tower may be in the shadow of the Twin Towers but it has earned itself a place in the tourism map of the world.

Since the spectacular launch of the fourth tallest communication tower in the world four years ago, the KL Tower or "Menara KL" has also become a landmark which Malaysians are proud of.

Critics may say the tower is a white elephant or a waste of public money but Menara KL has silently brought about a quantum leap if not a "revolution" to the Malaysian telecommunication scene.

The technologies in the bosom of KL Tower which stands majestically among the cloud, can best be described as one of the most ambitious, mammoth project ever undertaken in Malaysia.

True to its original objective, KL Tower and the telecommunication technology it hosted, have upgraded the quality of telecommunications and the clarity of broadcast transmission while meeting the telecommunication demands of the country.

KL Tower CEO Shahidah Ridwan in an interview with Bernama said: "I believe the tower has met its objective, that is, to enhance the quality of telecommunications and broadcasting."

The tower, she said, provides a wider reception field for broadcasting and telecommunication in the Klang Valley area and this is due to the space availability in the tower and the short distance between transmitters and antennas.

It therefore allow for future expansion of TV and FM-radio transmissions.

"Because of the height of the tower, Menara KL can be used to place certain equipment to be used, especially during emergency. Therefore departments like the armed forces, police and traffic have their equipment at our tower head," she said.

WRONG PERCEPTIONS

A highly innovative combination of retail, leisure, entertainment and most of all a hi-tech center for telecommunications, naturally attracts a great deal of attention to the tower, which has evolved into a major tourist attraction as well.

The main point here is that the tower is functional and the negative reactions from certain quarters, according to Shahidah, could be due to a misperception amongst people who do not have a full understanding of KL Tower, from the economic, sosial, sports and cultural perspectives.

"I must say that they are entitled for their opinion but by telling why Menara KL was built and what role it has been playing, we will help to correct this wrong perception," she said.

Shahidah said the tower was built first of all for telecommunication and it has definitely been a great asset to the country in that area. At the same time, it has become a landmark to Malaysia.

"...and with various promotions that we have carried out in the last few years, we have managed to put Menara KL in the global tourist map, so I hope people with the wrong perception would now change their mind," she said.

ONE MILLION VISITORS A YEAR

Shahidah said the tower to date has received 4.5 million tourists or

one million visitors a year.

By now, the management has organised a series of feats to focus on the unique features of the towers, and to keep the visitors coming.

Shahidah said KL Tower has recorded a "first" by being the only tower in the world to organise a BASE Jump. "That (Base Jump) was a really successful event because more than 50 jumpers came from all over the world," she added.

Other events at the tower that had secured a place in the Malaysian Book of Records are abseiling, the Towerthon and Backward Staircase Climb.

But for the average visitors, the tower offers an exciting programme where they can get to dine, shop or take in a bird's eye view of the city of lights all in one tower.

There is a revolving restaurant at the tower head for those who want to dine in style, a theatre, an amphitheatre, a cyber center, beautiful cascading pools, souvenir shops and the world's highest fastfood restaurant, a McDonald's.

"At the same time, we have additional income from the megaview banquet deck where we are able to hold private function for small group of 200 people, very suitable for corporate functions like signing ceremony, press conference, small private dinner and we had few weddings organised there as well," she said.

SYMBOL OF ISLAMIC HERITAGE

KL Tower, perched atop Bukit Nanas and rises to a height of 421m is the fourth tallest communication tower in the world, after the CN Tower (553m) in Toronto, the Ostankino Tower (537m) in Moscow and the Shanghai Tower (450m) in Shanghai.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who launched the tower on Oct 1, 1996, said it symbolised the success of the government's privatisation policies as it was the direct result of the Telecommunications Department's privatisation.

He said comments by certain parties who wanted to insult the taste of Malaysians by saying that the tower looked like "a baby's rattle" showed their envy, and should be ignored.

The brainchild of a group of talented local architects of Kumpulan Senireka Sdn Bhd, the Islamic motifs of the tower are to reflect the best of Malaysia's Islamic Heritage.

"The tower might not have been built if the Government still ran the telecommunications services. When the government held the monopoly, it had to allocate more than RM100 million each year just to provide telecommunications services. Surely, we would not have had enough money to build this tower which cost about RM300 million," Dr Mahathir added.

BRICKBAT VERSUS PRAISES

A political publication two years ago carried a front-page report saying that the tower was "cracking" in several spots but it was then proven that the allegation was baseless after its management conducted a thorough check at the area.

Shahidah when asked if such statements had affected tourism at the tower, said, "No, tourism was not affected then." She noted that visitors from the states where that political party is in power, still flocked to the tower despite the allegation.

Tourists when met while enjoying the bird's eye view of the city at the observation platform, were all praises for the tower.

Sandie Andrews, 50, an American who is a first-time visitor to Malaysia said she did not expect KL Tower to be a modern and sophisticated architectural piece.

"The architecture is absolutely wonderful, the only thing I have seen similar is the one in Chicago; the green parks in between everything make a contrast of it. It is brilliant for a government to build such a tower.

"The tower is very nicely done and the architecture, is not just modern but it adds some old fashion flavour to it, the combination is really nice," she said.

When asked if it is a waste of money to build such a tower, Sandie said: "It is not a waste of money at all, you have to have thing like this if you want to compete in the worldwide tourist market, to come here and be able to see almost the whole of Kuala Lumpur is absolutely wonderful."

Jennifer Tan, 42, a Singaporean, said she was surprised to learn that Kuala Lumpur is not anything bad as she had heard about, and she was impressed with KL Tower's architectural design.

"People say you can spot so many wooden houses and old buildings in KL but after I came up here (at the observation platform), I hardly see that (old buildings) but instead such a modern city, very nice, extremely amazing," she said.

KL Tower, she said, deserved a world recognition and Malaysia should be proud to own it.

Even locals are impressed and are proud of KL Tower. Jamin Hassan, 69, a pensioner from Perlis, said that KL Tower could be an asset for future generations to look up to as a "Malaysia Boleh" project.

He said such buildings are tourist attractions to generate more revenue for the government and people.

RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

KL Tower has from time to time gained international recognition and had bagged the WQC International Star Awards from Business Initiative Direction at its 17th convention in Madrid.

It had also received the Award of Distinction in 1997 from the International Real Estate Federation (FIABCI International) for its singular achievement in serving national interest and its prominent role in the property industry.

Shahidah said KL Tower while collecting millions in rentals every year from the various tenants who realised its commercial value, also has an influence in increasing the value of real estate in its neighbouring areas.

"Surrounding areas like the forest certainly benefits from Menara KL. In fact, during our early days the forest was closed to the public but we managed to talk to the Forestry Department to open up the forest two years ago, and since then it has been receiving a steady flow of visitors as well.

"And I believe some of the hotels around the tower have also arranged for shuttle service to bring their tourists to the tower and they have used Menara Kuala Lumpur as an attraction," she said.

Shahidah said the management of KL Tower will continue to improve and promote the tower to make it a "must" for all visitors.

Asked how she would like the tower to be seen in the next decade, she said: "I would like to see the tower as the first place for the foreign tourists to go to and a place not to be missed. I believe the tower is an asset to the country." -- Bernama

ZAI KGO