

#### A fighter pilot takes charge

The Minister for the Federal Territories, Dato' Zulhasnan Rafique was a former Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) fighter pilot, who had his early education at the La Salle High School in Petaling Jaya before moving to the Victoria Institution in Kuala Lumpur. He joined the RMAF in 1972 and retired in 1985 with the rank of Major.

Dato' Zulhasnan, 52, ventured into business after retirement and served as managing director and executive chairman of Seri Meraga Consolidated Sdn Bhd. He entered politics in 1995 and won the Wangsa Maju parliamentary constituency in the 1999 general elections.

He was appointed Deputy Federal Territories Minister in March 2004 before his promotion to the full Minister's post on 14 February, 2006. Currently, Dato' Zulhasnan is the Member of Parliament for Setiawangsa and the deputy chairman of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

An active sportsman, Dato' Zulhasnan played rugby, badminton, soccer and squash. He is also a good swimmer and enjoys horse riding and polo.

## At the helm of the FEDERAL TERRITORIES

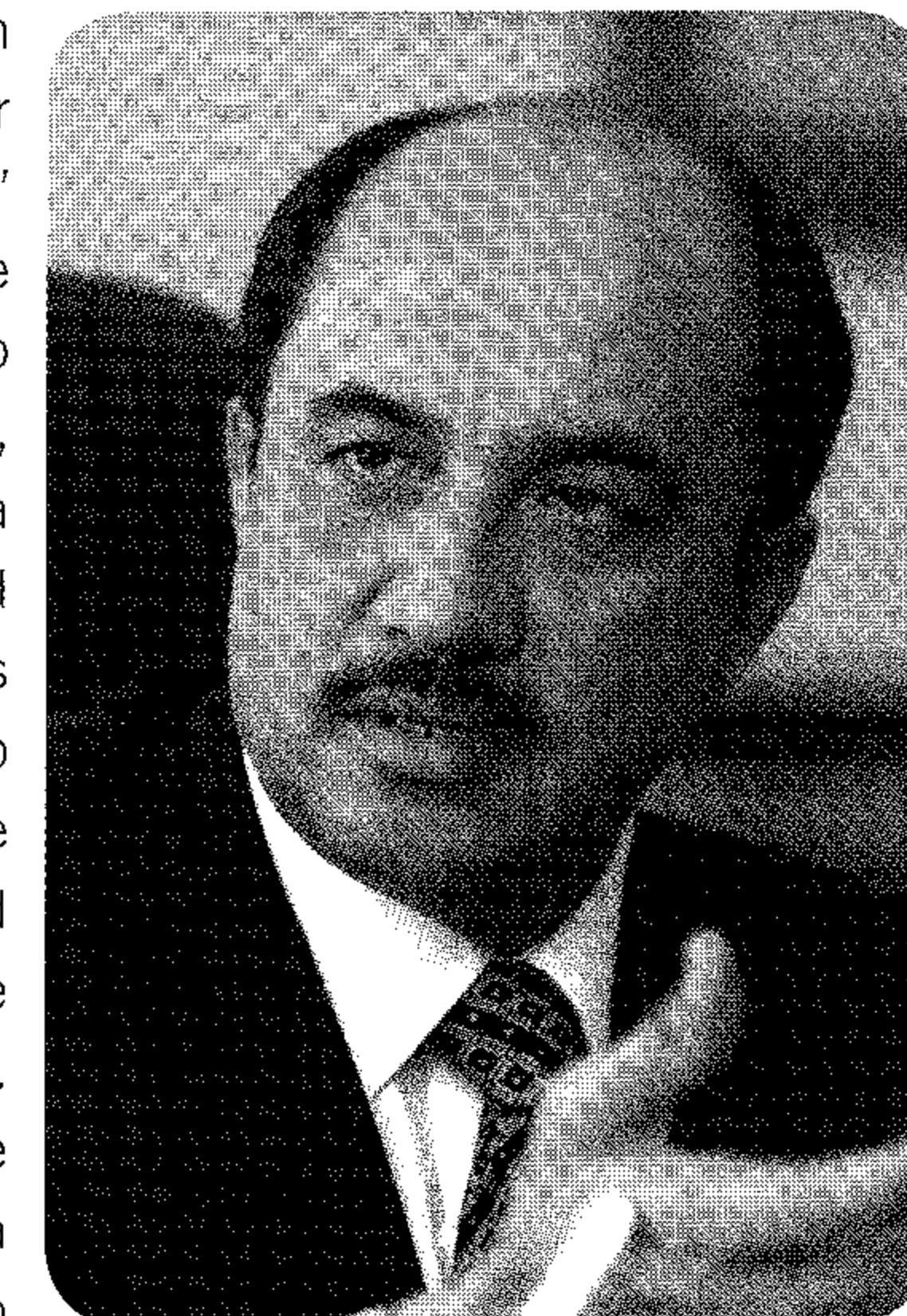
**KL's Dato' Zulhasnan Rafique is the second man to take the post of Federal Territories Minister and the first from KL. Nearly one year on ("I actually was given the post on Valentine's Day, 2006," he declares with an ironic laugh), this former fighter pilot and avid sportsman describes the pace of change and the challenges ahead**

It's a warm and balmy day in Putrajaya, a typical one for this time in February. Dato' Zulhasnan Rafique—the Federal Territories Minister who oversees capital Kuala Lumpur, the seat of government Putrajaya and resort and banking island Labuan—stands in his office, puts his hand against the large floor to ceiling windows that overlook the green snaking river below and across to the grand, pink granite mosque that is a landmark here. "Putrajaya is a wild card," he explains, "we have to make a decision whether we want it to become a federal centre only or do we want to extend it further and develop it into a KL II; that's the decision I proposed to Putrajaya Corporation and they should be coming up with the answer soon because it's a totally different dimension, a radically different scale of development than what it's been working under. It has to be a political decision, I'll reserve comment 'til there's a decision," Dato' Zulhasnan says with a wink and a smile, a mindful eye on the Prime Minister's office that sits in the near distance.

Dato' Zulhasnan is in a rare and interesting position: he is the main point man for the government to implement strategy for three important cities, two of which are arguably the most powerful in the country ("When you fly into KLIA, invariably you have two destinations: KL for business and fun and Putrajaya for business with the government," he states bluntly), and to bring them into a developed identity as the Federal Territory. "Oh that's certainly one of the challenges," he begins, "getting the identity correct. Before, each city had its own flag, its own song etc. We've actually created a Federal Territory Flag and even a song to reinforce that concept; that we are a unity, not only separate geographies." Few people realize that the Federal Territory has the same political weight as any of the 13 Malaysian States (although it

is not a state itself), something akin to Washington D.C if it had New York City and the Bahamas as part of its domain. As such it's a hefty responsibility in management and political terms.

He's well equipped for such demands. Before his political career began, before he was a successful businessman, Dato' Zulhasnan led a high flying career as a fighter pilot for the Malaysian Air Force, a



manifestation that taught him the power of discipline and execution. "Of course the military is the best way to get a young man oriented, it certainly taught me valuable lessons. But I'm also a sportsman, that's one of the reasons I really believe that's what our cities need more of, sports facilities and activities. I mean if a young man doesn't have that as one of his options, if he only turns to the street, then we fail in our plan to address the social. You know we're completing 35,000 low cost homes this year, that's a major achievement, but you also have

to address the social elements, what happens when these guys leave the house, what do they do? They need activities and opportunities, we have to engage them," he says with determination. "And you know, we need to look after our green space, that's important in any major city. We will be developing more areas and making sure that they are all accessible and inviting. Meanwhile, we have to ensure that the three cities [in the Federal Territories] are fully developed by 2020 which is a target that the government has set," he declares, knowing full well that such a benchmark is a daunting proposition. "But you know, we have incredible resources in our cities; we have to streamline processes, we have to have a cohesive integration of all the parties and we have to create identity. That's really what we're trying to achieve with Federal Territory Day: we'll have a parade of 5000 people, a Federal Territory Personality Award and much more, all to make people aware of that identity." Asked what drives his ambition Dato' Zulhasnan is unrepentant: "You need to be in the city, you need to have the passion for it. I mean we [the Federal Territory Ministry] need to be an engine for change," Dato' Zulhasnan declares resolutely, "we need to lead the way." **KL**