



Mahathir's vision for KL

by Maria J.Dass
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR was declared as a Federal Territory on Feb 1, 1974. At the time there was a smattering of tall buildings, like the black and white Bank Bumiputra Malaysia building, followed by the Maybank tower and Dayabumi later.

The roads which were flanked with aging and neglected pre-war shops were plied by cars and rickety non-air conditioned Omnibuses with clouds of black smoke spewing from exhaust pipes and old Mercedes black and yellow diesel taxis.

Effective city planning, transportation options and connectivity to other parts of the surrounding Klang Valley were poor. Haphazard, street and back lane hawker stalls were aplenty, though no one complained about the cheap meals they served.

When Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad became Prime Minister in 1981, he made a pledge to turn the capital city into a world-class one with modern amenities, a seemingly uphill task at that time.

Fast forward to 2003, KL has without a doubt surpassed and achieved most of its plans made almost more than 20 years ago. In fact, it has achieved more than Mahathir had envisioned at the time he took office. Mahathir had always taken a personal interest in the development of KL and been a great part of its achievements.

During his tenure, the development and administration of KL was shifted from the jurisdiction of the Federal Territory Ministry in 1978 and placed under the Prime Minister's department on May 20, 1987.

Mahathir's passion for travel had filled him with plenty of ideas and visions which he strove to introduce and implement in the country.

With these observations and ideas, he has managed to unfurl KL's unique and rich history to the world, while infusing it with modern amenities, architecture and capabilities.

Its unique blend of old and modern

buildings, calming greenery by day and bright twinkling lights at night, great shopping, cheap food, nightlife and unique blend of ethnic groups, is what many reviews on KL rave about.

It is without doubt an ideal tourist haven and place to live in. Its success has been an inspiration to many other cities in developing countries.

KL under Mahathir's guiding hand was developed upon the "prosper thy neighbour" concept in line with the New Economic Policy.

Mahathir encouraged Malay entrepreneurs to set up their businesses in KL which was previously dominated by Chinese traders who operated around the Jalan Petaling area, and the Indian mer-



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chants who operated out of Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

The fruits of his efforts can be seen by the increasing number of bumiputera entrepreneurs setting up businesses not only in central KL but also in the many large shopping centres which have mushroomed all around KL and its outskirts.

What once used to be a town full of shops and businesses with signboards of a Chinese character has now transformed into a cosmopolitan character and identity boasting local and international commercial ventures.

It is rapidly becoming an international banking, financial and MICE centre although the government administrative machinery is slowly moving to Putrajaya,

situated within the Multimedia Super Corridor.

Mahathir had a keen interest in matters pertaining to KL and always made it a point to share his ideas, opinions and displeasures, said KL Mayor Datuk Mohamad Shaid Mohd Taib. "He was so full of ideas," he said.

"Before I became mayor I used to sit in at meetings chaired by the Prime Minister's Department.

"One could not help but admire his cascading ideas, I was amazed at it and the way he motivated people to carry these out," he said.

Mahathir's observations during his unannounced tours of Light Rail Transit (LRT) stations, drives around town or

observations while having a cuppa along Bintang Walk, are brought up during post-cabinet meetings.

Asked if Mahathir was forceful or feared when making these suggestions, Mohamad Shaid said: "No, he was a man of few words, non-antagonistic, non-acrimonious, soft-spoken, sharp and very motivating and inspiring."

Whatever he said we always very precise and clear, and left the authorities in charge with a sense of urgency to carry out the task as fast as they could, said Mohamad Shaid in an interview.

What if the work done was not up to standard?

"Well, he will make his displeasure known in a very nice manner, so much so,

one would feel so guilty for not completing the task properly," he said.

"I have never seen Mahathir lose his temper, although we know by looking at his face that he is displeased about something," said Mohamad Shaid.

"Then everybody will be scrambling to find out what it actually is," he laughed.

"Mahathir's charisma and guiding force are always behind us and this is what made KL excel in many areas.

"Most of what you see in KL today is driven by Mahathir's visions and goals," said Mohamad Shaid.

He is the architect behind the Garden City of Lights concept, the modern transportation system which is rapidly increasing connectivity between far flung areas in KL and its outskirts.

Mahathir's love for heritage buildings has also seen many old pre-war shoplots saved from being demolished, he said.

Has the development of Putrajaya distracted his attention from KL? Not at all, said Mohamad Shaid, adding that his focus is very much on ensuring both develop into world-class cities.

Will the motivation and drive which he injects wane when he departs from the administration?

No, said Mohd Shaid. "He has left us with Vision 2020 and laid out the path for us to follow.

"With the guidance and road maps which he has given us, we know where exactly we are headed and how to make use of the tracks laid out for us to achieve the best."

As Mahathir puts it, making KL a world-class city is "A journey without end".

Among the more urgent tasks which Mahathir has laid out in these road maps are the implementation of the sprinkler system on top of tall buildings to cool the atmosphere and reduce pollution, the possibility of introducing air-conditioned and mist-fan cooled walkways, centralising hawkers into international food and gourmet centres all around town and most of all, the need to address the cleanliness and rat infestation problems.

An excellent habitat which is living and livable with a better quality of life for all.

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HOW K.L. HAS GROWN



KUALA LUMPUR (KL) began as a shanty mining town in the 1850 at the confluence of the Gombak and Klang rivers, following the discovery of tin at the spot by 87 Chinese miners, led by Lukut's Raja Abdullah and his brother Raja Jumaat. KL later boomed, following the increasing demand for tin and rubber during the Industrial Revolution in Europe and America.

POPULATION

1857	.....	87 people
1880	.....	2,000 people
1974	.....	878,000 people
1980	.....	919,610 people
1991	.....	1.3 million people
2000	.....	2.2 million people



ECONOMY

1857 - Becomes a tin, rubber, trade and industrial hub.

1880 - British moves their administration centre to KL from Klang in view of its rapid economic growth. This marks the beginning of its growth as a modern township with modern amenities, attracting migrant workers from the Malay archipelago, China and India.

A Sanitary Board is set up to manage the town's development.

1943 - Japanese abolish the Sanitary Board.

1946 - British returns and set up a KL town board.

1948 - KL attains township status.

1952 - KL Town Council holds first elections.

1960 - The Federal Capital Commission is set up in line with the enforcement of the Federal Capital Act 1960.

1972 - KL attains city status. Kuala Lumpur City Hall replaces the Federal Capital Commission.

1974 - KL becomes a Federal Territory.

1978 - KL is placed under the Federal Territory (FT) Ministry.

1987 - FT Ministry abolished and KL City Hall administration placed under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Department.