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TheStar Exclusive

Facing challenges head on

Within weeks of taking the hot seat as Kuala Lumpur mayor, Datuk Mahadi Che Ngah has established three task forces aimed at overcoming perennial flooding, traffic congestion and urban governance issues. He tells **BAVANI M** his vision for the capital city. >2&3.



Man with a plan: Mahadi looking over the city from his office balcony.
— ART CHEN/The Star



DBKL plans to get more commuters to switch to public transportation to eliminate traffic crawls like along this street in the heart of Kuala Lumpur.

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Three core issues on the mayoral agenda

Mahadi focuses on reducing carbon footprint, improving drainage and upskilling staff during his term

WHEN one has only two years to make a difference, the urgency becomes greater to do something meaningful and workable within that given time frame.

Which is why Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Mahadi Che Ngah has a tough job in these 24 months, having chosen to tackle the three perennial issues plaguing the country's capital city — floods, traffic congestion and urban governance.

“Can he do it?” is the question on every denizen's mind.

Well, the mayor says he has a plan.

Within two weeks after his October appointment to the top post in the city's administration, he established three task forces aimed at addressing those three core issues.

Two of the task forces are headed by Azmi Abdul Hamid who has stepped up to Mahadi's former position as Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) executive director of Project Implementation, while the third

one is spearheaded by executive director (Management) Hasimah Ismail.

“It is important to get things started quickly and that is what I have done with the setting up of the task forces,” said Mahadi.

“In two years' time, I may not be around but the task force will outlive me,” the 61-year-old said, referring to the end of his two-year term in September 2022.

“The goal is to have a plan and

work towards achieving that,” he told *StarMetro* in an interview one month after taking office as the city's 13th mayor.

“We owe it to the city's stakeholders who are paying the salaries of some 10,000 full-time and part-time City Hall employees, which is an estimated RM540mil of taxpayer money,” he said.

“That is why we need to give back to the community through capacity building, by developing,

nurturing and strengthening the skills as well as changing the mindsets and attitudes of DBKL staff,” he added.

Flood mitigation

“Flash floods, freak storms and unusually heavy rains that cause landslides are the signs of global warming and these need to be addressed,” said Mahadi.

“We have been experiencing

Menara DBKL 1 uses solar energy as part of the local government's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint.



DBKL staff will undergo training to enhance their skills in dealing with rate-payers, especially with the new 2040 draft plan (which replaces the KLCP 2020) being open to public feedback. — Filepic

(Below) Kuala Lumpur has experienced numerous severe floods in recent times. In this flash flood on Sept 2, firefighters are trying to help the driver of this car that is stuck in waist-high waters near the Taman Mutiara MRT station. — Filepic

extraordinary rainfall, the likes that we have never seen before.

“So the first thing we did was to map out the most vulnerable places by identifying 53 flood hotspots,” he said, highlighting that the work started last year under his predecessor Datuk Nor Hisham Ahmad Dahlan.

“Some (flood hotspots) are small, some are big, and now we are looking at both short-term and long-term solutions,” said Mahadi.

One of the hotspots that he made a point to visit as soon as he assumed the mayoral position, was the Taman Mutiara MRT station which was one of the worst affected areas in Kuala Lumpur.

Another area he identified was the city centre around the River of Life (RoL) project site and construction sites nearby.

He, however, stressed that the floods were the result of a series of Mother Nature and man-made occurrences that was further exacerbated by heavy rainfalls.

“Historically, Kuala Lumpur evolved from a brownfield site.

“The city grew organically, hence drains were not made to withstand the (extra rainfall) capacity.”

He explained that the task force would study the hotspots to find ways to stop floods in the short term.

The long-term flood mitigation plan, he said, involved upgrading drainage systems and redesigning pump systems at construction sites.

One of the projects in this masterplan is upgrading the culverts at the Taman Mutiara MRT site where DBKL will ensure better water flow.

DBKL also plans to collaborate with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) under the Newton-Ungku Umar Fund (NUOF) to develop a weather forecast app that will warn people of possible thunderstorms three days in advance.

It is called the Kuala Lumpur Multi-Hazard Platform.

Mahadi revealed that he had been personally testing the system via his cellphone for one month now to gauge the app's efficacy.

“For example, if we are alerted to possible heavy rain in Cheras three days from now, we will put a team on standby for traffic dispersal or get Alam Flora to clean the drains beforehand as a precautionary measure,” he said, noting that the early warning could also be

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Datuk Mahadi Che Ngah



disseminated via electronic billboards and the Integrated Transport Information System (Itis) in the city.

“I want to test it out for another six months before we give it a go,” he added.

Reducing carbon footprint

Part of the bigger picture in tackling climate change is reducing the city's carbon footprint.

And Mahadi has always been an advocate of Kuala Lumpur being a low-carbon city.

He has presented papers on the matter extensively overseas.

DBKL has established a task force that is working towards achieving the Kuala Lumpur Low Carbon Society Blueprint 2030 goals.

“So far we have managed to reduce carbon emission in the city by 54% and hope to hit the targeted 70% by 2030.

“We started reducing our carbon footprint at DBKL two years ago.

“Today, our buildings, namely the IDB Cheras, Menara DBKL 1 and 2 in Jalan Raja Laut and Menara 3 in Jalan Raja Abdullah, are energy-efficient.

“At IDB, we use solar energy.

“We hope all the other buildings will be solar-powered next year.

“And we only use LED lights for our buildings,” said Mahadi.

He said DBKL's electricity bills had reduced significantly since the green measures were implemented.

He pointed out that solar panels were installed at some of the city bus stops as well, to power the lights.

“Buildings and traffic are big contributors of carbon emissions.

“We hope to come up with incentives to encourage the private sector to reduce their carbon footprints.

“It is the task force's job to find effective ways to reduce it further,” he elaborated.

Urban governance

Another challenge the mayor aims to tackle is changing the mindset of DBKL's employees to deal with public engagement, increase their efficiency and enhance their effectiveness in handling public issues.

And part of this is to train staff in capacity building.

“We need to open their minds to having the commitment and perseverance to carry out their jobs well to benefit KLites,” said Mahadi, reminding that taxpayers were paying their salaries after all.

“We don't want to hear people say that we are not doing our job.”

He said DBKL's Human Resources Department had drawn up a comprehensive training plan and staff would be sent to the Cheras training centre to be trained to become more efficient and resilient in dealing with public complaints.

“It is going to be a challenge as they need to handle questions from the people pertaining to the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040 (KLSP2040) when public feedback sessions are open next year.

“Apart from being knowledgeable on the local plan, they need to be able to work under constant criticism.

“They (DBKL officers) must be able to answer questions properly and professionally.

“I will suggest to them to read Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*,” Mahadi added with a chuckle.

Traffic congestion

Another problem that city folk perennially complain about is



traffic jam.

Mahadi's first order of business was to set up a task force to study ways to ease congestion on Kuala Lumpur's streets.

“I have put together a team to brainstorm and find ways to ease the city's gridlock that seems to be getting worse by the day.

“From the first brainstorming session, we found out that there were about 2.8 million vehicles coming into the city centre every day, from Jalan Duta, Cheras, Ampang, Jalan Kuching, SUKE (Sungai Besi-Ulu Kelang Expressway), NKVE (New Klang Valley Expressway), NPE (New Pantai Expressway), from everywhere.

“And from the LOS (level of service), we discovered that we were always at Level E and F during peak hours, which is not good,” he admitted.

LOS is a mechanism to measure how a transportation facility is operating, from a traveller's perspective.

Typically, there are six levels of service — from A to F, with A representing the best operating conditions and F the worst.

Mahadi said the team discussed the fact that while there were no longer any new highways being built within the city centre, there were many missing links.

“The bulk of the traffic is coming from highways outside the city centre, and as soon as they hit the local roads, the gridlock starts.

“For instance, the traffic from Subang Jaya channelled via the NPE and going to Bangsar. The jam starts once motorists hit Jalan Bangsar.

“The situation is the same at Jalan Duta; it is a smooth drive on the highway but once they hit the roundabout in that area, the congestion starts.”

He told *StarMetro* that the task force was now studying ways to connect the missing links from one highway to another in order to divert traffic away from local roads.

“We are studying proposals to connect three highways to another, for traffic to bypass the local roads,” he said, adding that the link roads would be elevated.

The first is from Jalan Bangsar, to divert traffic from NPE through Kampung Pantai Dalam to Jalan Syed Putra and will connect to Istana Link (a proposed highway).

The second link is from the south of Kuala Lumpur connecting Setiawangsa-Pantai Expressway to the proposed Bandar Malaysia, Jalan Duta and DUKE 1.

The third dispersal route is from the city's north taking traffic from Kuala Lumpur-Kuala Selangor Expressway (Latar) through Jalan Ipoh and Jalan Kuching to DUKE 1.

“We don't want the traffic to come into the city but to disperse it away,” Mahadi reiterated.

To further ease congestion in the city, the task force is also looking at improving signalised junctions using the diverted diamond interchange method.

Areas identified for this are Jalan Pudu, Jalan Imbi and Jalan Hang Tuah where peak hour congestion is at its worst.

“We hope that in the next 100 days, we can at least see some improvements in Kuala Lumpur's traffic system,” said the mayor.

Perhaps that pragmatic optimism alongside his advantage of knowing the inner workings of the city like the back of his hand will help him achieve a measure of success in his plans.

Kuala Lumpur folks certainly hope so.