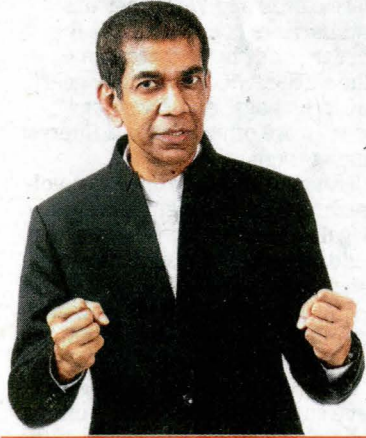


DBKL's vital role in the development of Kuala Lumpur



Through many windows

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OVERNIGHT, the Federal Territories Ministry became a department in the Prime Minister's Office when the unity government came into power after the 15th General Election.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim set the initial tone for Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) with his stated goal of increasing KL's capability and potential while making sure that those who operate small and medium-sized businesses have the chance to generate income. This

may also help to alleviate poverty in the city.

DBKL plays a crucial role in the administration of KL. It is responsible for setting policies that affect the lives of KLites such as policies on transportation, housing, business, enforcement of rules and regulations, and many others.

To carry out its responsibilities, Mayor Datuk Seri Mahadi Che Ngah last month announced a budget of RM2.604bil for 2023 – which is a substantial sum.

As a comparison, Selangor Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari announced a RM2.45bil state budget for next year. It should be clear that DBKL's annual budget exceeds that of a state that is run by an elected government. DBKL, on the other hand, is run by government officials.

The utilisation of a state budget is scrutinised and debated by the State Assembly and therefore transparent. The state government is also accountable to state residents through the Assembly. Who is DBKL and its huge budget accountable to? Does the fact that the former Federal Territories ministry is now a department in the Prime Minister's Office impact this? This is a question that concerned citizens are asking.

We must remember that one of the primary responsibilities of the city council is to make decisions about the city's budget – including how much money will be spent on various city services, such as police

and fire protection, parks and recreation, public works, and so on. The council also sets the assessment rate, which determines how much residents and businesses will pay in rates each year, which obviously will affect the cost of living.

In addition to managing the city's finances, DBKL also plays a role in making decisions about land use and development. This includes determining what types of development are allowed in different areas of the city, such as residential, commercial or industrial, and ensuring that new development projects meet zoning regulations.

Some developments may involve various stakeholders with competing interests. All these decisions will have a big impact on businesses and the general quality of life of city residents economically, socially and aesthetically.

Accountability and transparency becomes paramount when it comes to city land development as significant amounts of monies change hands. Transparency would also help to deter allegations of corruption which bodies of such a nature often face.

It is equally common that allegations of corruption are often levelled at city councils in the matters of enforcement and licensing of businesses. Early this year, a KL resident was recorded accusing DBKL enforcement officers of demanding bribes from vendors who had

breached licensing regulations. The audio clip became viral online.

Furthermore, we often hear about corruption in the issuing of permits for Ramadan bazaars. If this is rampant, it would be oppressive towards the lower income group in the city.

It is therefore critical that DBKL has an independent channel through which complaints of corruption and oppression, if any, by enforcement officers can be effectively dealt with. I would humbly suggest that random and anonymous on-the-ground visits by the mayor would help deter corruption and oppression.

The city council also acts as a legislative body, making by-laws and guidelines that govern the city. For example, the council may make by-laws to regulate the use of public spaces such as parks or to enforce certain building codes or to control and supervise, by registration, licensing or even by prohibition, a trade, business or industry. This power to make by-laws, however, is subject to the parent Act, the Local Government Act 1976.

To carry out its duties, DBKL has, I believe, 26 departments catering to various aspects of city administration, including arts, tourism and sports. I personally had dealings with previous DBKL mayors and officials for the development of badminton in KL. It is very important that mayors and the relevant officials have a proper perspective on

sports development in the city.

For example, my work as the president of the Kuala Lumpur Badminton Association (KLBA) involves engaging with 280 schools and about 220,000 students in KL. KLBA in the past also had to deal directly with the Federal Territories minister.

Hence it is very important that DBKL continues to engage with stakeholders in the city and to hold public meetings and forums where residents can voice their concerns and ask questions about city policies. The city council must also work with community organisations and advocacy groups to address issues of concern of the city's residents.

DBKL plays a vital role in the administration of KL. Through its decision-making powers, the council can determine how the city will be managed and how its residents will be served. By working together with and protecting the interests of the city's residents and business operators, DBKL can help to ensure that Malaysia's capital operates in a way that benefits everyone who lives and works there.

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