

Lam Thye recounts challenges serving in Kuala Lumpur

FROM drinking stream water to demonstrate that it is safe for consumption, to navigating knee-deep floodwaters to help residents trapped in their homes, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye was in the thick of things as a young politician.

Lee recollected drinking the water when addressing a water shortage issue.

It was a courageous gesture, one he said he would not attempt today.

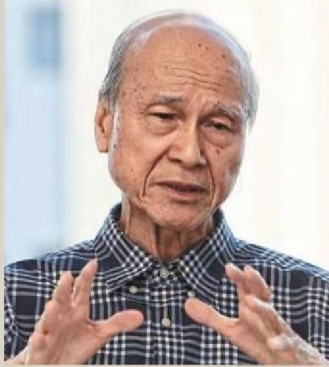
The 77-year-old also vividly recalled his efforts negotiating with squatters reluctant to leave their areas for government housing almost five decades ago.

"I distinctly remember joining the late Tan Sri Yaacob Abdul Latiff, who was the second mayor of Kuala Lumpur, in these negotiations with the squatters," Lee recounted.

At that time, he was serving as assemblyman for Bukit Nanas during the era when Kuala Lumpur was still part of Selangor.

Kuala Lumpur was only designated as the nation's capital city in 1972 and became a Federal Territory in 1974.

"I was 23 and eager to serve. It was during those early years that I learned that being a politician required a lot of patience, commitment, understanding and a thick skin,"



Lee: Kuala Lumpur's drainage system needs an overhaul to prevent flash floods.

he said half in jest.

Lee, who represented Bukit Nanas in the state legislative assembly from 1969 to 1974, described the Kuala Lumpur of that period as akin to the wilderness, characterised by numerous squatter colonies, hawkers and rubbish everywhere.

He has seen the city transform dramatically from its early days and despite being in the Opposition, he had a strong working relationship with all Kuala Lumpur mayors, a relationship he maintains until today.

Lee served as Kuala Lumpur Bandar MP from 1974 to 1990 before it was renamed



Bukit Bintang.

He also served a single term between 1978 and 1982 as Serdang assemblyman.

"After I left politics in 1990, I became an activist, and I would say that my most rewarding time was being a member of the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) Advisory Board.

"I was able to do a lot of voluntary and social work, things are much easier when you are no longer a politician (with the Opposition)."

Lee went on to serve on the advisory board for 16 years and is the longest-serving member to date.

He was in charge of the

environment and anti-vandalism committee and took on other roles as well until he left in February 2008.

Lee said the foremost challenge facing Kuala Lumpur today was enhancing the quality of life for its residents and businesses.

"The key to this is upgrading infrastructure and promoting environmental sustainability.

"Overhauling the drainage system to prevent flash floods, enforcing anti-pollution regulations and deepening rivers are critical steps."

He emphasised too that maintaining public facilities, such as consistently cleaning public toilets as well as repairing roads and potholes, was essential for safety and cleanliness.

"There is a pressing need to cultivate a culture of maintenance in public parks and recreational areas.

"I think a revamp of the DBKL administration is necessary for prompt and transparent response to public complaints and to uphold integrity in licence issuance and planning approvals.

"It is a collective effort among DBKL, government agencies, businesses and residents; we all have a role to play in keeping our city clean," Lee added. —

BAVANI M

Lee checking stream water on May 21, 1981. On the left is current Cheras MP Tan Kok Wai.