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KL's Mayor Shares His Vision For The City

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Mayor With A Vision

VKL Speaks To The No-Nonsense Civil Servant Who Runs Kuala Lumpur.

By Ronald Sba

He's a man with a vision and a busy schedule to meet. A retinue of assistants, stacks of files tucked under their arms, follow in his wake and rush to keep him abreast of developments as he swiftly makes his way through our photo shoot. Once that's over, our subject quickly settles himself (and his retinue) down at the large conference table for the interview.

At the age of 60, and with more than 30 years' experience in the civil service behind him, Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman bin Shariff, the Datuk Bandar (Lord Mayor) of Kuala Lumpur, shows no sign of letting up on his hectic schedule.

His initially austere demeanour – which served him well while he was Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence, a post he held immediately prior to his appointment as mayor – is broken by some light-hearted humour which he injects liberally during the interview. The ice is broken. Yet, he still retains a definite air of authority.

As mayor, Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman heads Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (Kuala Lumpur City Hall), an organisation with 19 departments and a staff of 10,000, which has the task of running Malaysia's thriving capital city.

His record is impressive. Nearing the end of his five-year tenure, his administration has seen the completion of mega-projects such as the Petronas Twin Towers, the Light Rail Transit (LRT) system, Sentral and massive road-building projects which have helped ease the city's traffic woes. The highly successful 1998



Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games was yet another triumph for this frank father-of-two.

A host of other urban services and facilities, from recreation and sports, to clean eateries and public amenities, have also been provided during his time in office. Over 45,000 units of public housing intended for the urban poor, have also been constructed, while the number of squatter families living in sub-standard accommodation has been drastically reduced.

City Hall has also stepped up its efforts to promote Kuala Lumpur as a tourist destination. Spearheading this tourism drive is the recently-formed Tourism Council, which plans and markets Kuala Lumpur through an extensive network of local and international agencies. Since its inception, the Tourism Council has held roadshows in the United Arab

Emirates, Australia, Japan and neighbouring Singapore, promoting the city, often in association with other government agencies.

"Our goal is to increase the average length of stay (ALS) from the present 1.6 days per tourist to three days," the mayor said.

This will be achieved, he explained, via an aggressive promotion of Kuala Lumpur's many attractions like the Bird Park, the Butterfly Park, the Orchid Gardens and the Lake Gardens. There's also Central Market and the shopping, dining and entertainment outlets along Bintang Walk and Jalan P. Ramlee, Jalan Perak and Jalan Pinang near the Twin Towers. The distinctly Indian and Chinese atmosphere of Jalan Masjid India and Petaling Street will also be enhanced.

"Wholesome and family-oriented attractions such as eateries and shopping centres have great development potential," he adds. "We KL-ites sometimes take our parks for granted. To many visitors, especially those from the Middle East, Kuala Lumpur is an oasis of greenery."

The mayor also outlined his plans to make Kuala Lumpur a "World City". However, he was quick to point out that the term is more a utopian ideal than a reality.

"There isn't one city in the world which can truly be called a "World City". The term is purely a concept of which Kuala Lumpur has many components, like an efficient transportation network, system of administration, and a broad range of public amenities," he explained.

