

● **The FT Constituencies:** **Batu**

NOW THE RACE FOR PROGRESS

By FARIDAH YAACOB

Alex Lee wants to change 'small-town' image of Batu

AS soon as Datuk Alex Lee became Member of Parliament for Batu, he started his plans to turn the area's raw, small-town image to one reflective of a modern suburb.

Batu, an opposition stronghold before the 1986 elections, bore the brunt of near-neglect and sluggish progress for many years.

Datuk Lee's battle for progress has managed to lend a semblance of development to the area. But the struggle continues.

Batu, a seat created in 1982, covers Sentul, the Batu Caves area, Kampung Batu and areas previously under Kepong and Sepuluh.

Datuk Lee describes his constituency as "part urban" (Sentul, Setapak and Jalan Ipoh), and "part rural" (such as the kampongs in Gombak).

Batu's 60,000-odd constituents also mirror its

mixed identity.

Middle-class businessmen and squatters lie at opposite ends of the social spectrum.

In between come the lower-income groups — the farmers and railway workers.

Squatters and re-development, which were Datuk Lee's prime concern when he won the Batu seat, remain his principle worry at present.

"The area houses a huge network of squatters, probably the biggest in the Federal Territory," he says, putting the current number of squatters at 15,000 compared with 20,000 when Batu became his responsibility.

As such, Datuk Lee's priority lies in getting basic infrastructure to these areas.

Basic amenities too would be given to a number of Malay kampongs in Gombak plus the several pockets of Malay reserve land that have this far been left out of the race towards progress.

"It is regrettable that these areas have to do without roads, water and electricity but we are in the process of providing these," he says.

And although it may seem that he has a massive job on his hands, Datuk Lee is confident of turning Batu around.

Re-development has given a large part of the constituency a facelift.

One of the biggest projects is the Bandar Baru Sentul. Others include the large number of housing estates that have sprung up over the years.

A further 30,000 new units of flats are being built in Kampung Pasir Wardeburn, Taman Melati, Bandar Baru Sentul and Wangsa Maju.

The much-publicised Kampung Chubadak squatter problem is also in the process of being resolved. These 1,400 squatters from five Malay kampongs two years ago vacated their land to make way for low-cost flats.

They are being housed in temporary City Hall longhouses while awaiting the completion of the flats.

"Construction work will begin soon," assures Datuk Lee.

The once major problem of hawking, meanwhile, has been substantially eradicated especially along the Genting/Klang Highway.

A plan has also been outlined to resolve the perennial scourge of flooding.

"The plan which we are working on, will soon ease the problem," says Datuk Lee.

Also included in the pipeline are plans to further widen Jalan Gombak, the Genting/Klang highway and to straighten Jalan Sentul.

"The former will take time as land has to be acquired from shopowners bordering both sides of the road," says Datuk Lee.

He is also keen on beautification.

"We are grateful to City Hall for initiating projects that instil within residents an awareness of beautifying the area," he says, citing the authority's current 'Beautiful Flat' competition as an example.

Gotong-royongs, dialogue sessions with the police and other authorities, plus the setting up of residents associations was made possible with the help of the authority.

Despite his diverse responsibilities, Datuk Lee strives to make himself accessible to his constituents.

He does this by attending as many gotong-royongs as is allowed by his punishing schedule.

He also maintains three service centres, in Jalan Ipoh, Gombak and Sentul respectively.

His hope for the area is modernisation through adequate infrastructure and recreational facilities.

"We want to give the people a sense of belonging, to make them feel that the Government is there to help them," he says.



Datuk Alex Lee: 'We want to give the people a sense of belonging'

Always in tune with his constituents

DATUK Alexander Lee Yu Lung's focus on bread-and-butter campaign issues during the 1986 elections was probably the ticket which won him the Batu parliamentary seat.

Although born into the wealthy family of Tun Sir Henry H.S. Lee, Datuk Lee was fully aware of the plight of the less-fortunate.

More importantly, he had the formula and the credentials to lift Batu residents out of an economic slump.

Having began his career as a lawyer, Datuk Lee, who obtained his M.A. from Leys School, Cambridge, and LLB from St John's College, Cambridge University, subsequently made a switch to banking.

It was his years of experience in the arena of business that was the thrust employed to woo members of the industrial and commercial Batu constituency.

Datuk Lee's colourful political history, however, began much earlier.

He was appointed to the MCA's central working committee in 1971 and expelled

from the party for his outspoken ways and reformist attitude in 1973.

He joined the Gerakan a year later.

The same year, he contested the then Kuala Lumpur Bandar seat, pitted against Mr Lee Lam Thye and Pekemas' Mr Yeoh Teck Chye. Datuk Lee polled 6,490 votes in his election debut, losing out to Mr Lee, who polled 15,112 votes.

With the defeat, Datuk Lee retreated from frontline politics to concentrate on his banking career.

He, however, did not give up his reins on politics during his 12 years' absence from the political limelight. He was Gerakan's national treasurer and a member of the Dewan Negara at the time.

Setapak-born Datuk Lee has served, and continues to serve, on numerous business, social and sports organisations.

Currently a Gerakan Central Committee member, he has also acted in an advisory capacity to the Government and other many occasions.

Datuk Lee is married to a German and has three children.

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TOMORROW: MP for Sepuluh, Mr Liew Ah Khim