

Keeping cities green

2023 has seen some of Kuala Lumpur's green spaces saved after public objections. The extension of the MRT line to Putrajaya also ensures both cities are on track towards more sustainable transportation. >2&3

An aerial photograph of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, showing a mix of urban development and green spaces. In the foreground, a red and white MRT train travels along an elevated concrete track that curves through a lush green area. Above the train, a modern, curved pedestrian bridge with a textured, scale-like facade spans across the landscape. In the background, the city's skyline is dominated by several tall skyscrapers, including the Petronas Twin Towers. The sky is bright with scattered clouds. A large green leaf graphic is positioned in the upper right corner of the image.

Less congestion: Efforts have been made for smoother travel in Kuala Lumpur (top) with the implementation of bus and contraflow lanes while the MRT Putrajaya Line, launched in March, is a boost for public transport.

2023: The year KL folk speak up

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Stakeholders more vocal in pressuring authorities for protection of green spaces in the capital city with success in some cases

THE past 12 months saw Kuala Lumpur folk rising up in greater numbers to have their voices heard.

They objected to development near several water bodies and green spaces, and in some cases, were successful in having these projects cancelled.

In April, Datuk Seri Mahadi Che Ngah retired as mayor and was replaced by Datuk Kamarulzaman Mat Salleh.

Just over a week ago, a Cabinet reshuffle saw a new minister in the Prime Minister's Department brought in to helm the Federal Territories, albeit still under the watchful eye of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Retention pond saved

In the first half of the year, *StarMetro* published a series of reports on planned development projects near flood retention ponds in Kuala Lumpur.

Following the exposé, the government cancelled the proposed alienation of the Bohol pond to a private developer.

The Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur Land Exco (JKTWP/PL) had given conditional approval to the company to alienate part of the land for a housing project on Oct 20, 2021.

The matter came to light thanks to whistle-blowers who revealed plans to alienate land surrounding the pond for a housing project.

In May, following public objections, the government cancelled the proposed alienation as the developer had failed to fulfil key technical requirements.

Not long after, KL MPs and stakeholders questioned the government's move to degazette land at the Batu flood retention pond, located off Jalan Kuching.

The Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur Land and Mines Office (PTGWP) confirmed that a portion of the pond had been alienated for a mixed development project.

Land in park sold

In August, news broke that a substantial portion of Taman Rekreasi Ayer Panas in Setapak



A portion of land surrounding the Batu retention pond, off Jalan Kuching, could not be saved from development.



had been sold to a private company for a mixed development project.

Anwar's political secretary Datuk Azman Abidin said JKTWP/PL reviewed and approved the alienation of the land on Feb 15, 2018.

Seven months later, the developer paid a premium of about RM130mil for the land.

However, in early 2019 the government decided to cancel the land deal since the title had not been changed to reflect transfer of ownership. The land premium was returned to the company.

The company filed a lawsuit against the land office and won at the High Court and Court of Appeal.

It is understood that although it was government land, it had not been gazetted.

Based on the National Land Code 1965, non-gazetted land did not require a public announce-



Dr Zaliha wants DBKL to increase its revenue.

ment of its sale nor an objection hearing.

And thus, Kuala Lumpur lost another green space in the name of development.

Alleviating traffic congestion

The city's worsening traffic saw Transport Minister Anthony Loke tasking various agencies to implement contraflow on three major roads to ease congestion during peak hours.

In June, the contraflow lanes were implemented from the Sungai Besi toll plaza to the Besraya Interchange (2.4km), Jalan Maharajalela to Taman Connaught (4km) and from Ampang Point to Jalan Tun Razak (3km), with the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research (MiroS) drawing up the guidelines.

A dedicated bus lane along Jalan Ampang was also introduced to help ease traffic congestion during peak hours.

In October, Loke announced that three new bus lanes would be introduced in Jalan Kuching (5.7km), Jalan Cheras-Jalan Loke Yew (11.5km) and Jalan Genting Kelang (8.7km), in phases, from November.

Minister's post revived

The Cabinet reshuffle on Dec 12 saw former Health minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa appointed as Minister in charge of Federal Territories under the Prime Minister's Department.

Just a little over a year ago, when Anwar announced his new Cabinet line-up, no mention was made of the Federal Territories

ministry, which oversaw the three federal territories of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan.

Instead, the ministry was restructured as the Federal Territories Department (JWP) and placed under the Prime Minister's Department.

During her meetings with JWP, Dr Zaliha said her priority would be reducing urban poverty. She also told Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to increase its revenue.

In September, Datuk Noridah Abdul Rahim was appointed JWP secretary-general, replacing Datuk Seri Rosida Jaafar.

KLSP2040 gazetted

On Nov 9, the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040 (KLSP2040), was launched by Anwar.

The document contained the vision, goals, strategic directions and actions to drive Kuala Lumpur's growth and development for the next 20 years.

The KLSP2040 was delayed to allow for more engagement sessions with stakeholders.

In July, Anwar asked DBKL to implement improvements to the KLSP 2040 draft before it



A 500m-long stretch of Jalan Alor in Bukit Bintang has gone car-free at night.



People making a beeline for KL's newest shopping destination, The Exchange TRX in Jalan Tun Razak.



DBKL expects to earn RM2mil a year from charging foreigners RM1 a trip on GoKL buses from next year.



A sign put up by a resident of Taman Desa informing the public that the barricaded portion of the road is private land.

was gazetted.

He said the focus should be on maintaining forest reserve and open areas, while expanding affordable housing.

However, some residents' groups questioned why their feedback was not incorporated into the final plan.

The KLSP 2040 was approved by the Prime Minister on Oct 4 and gazetted on Oct 19.

No free rides

In December, DBKL announced that it would impose a fee on non-Malaysians using the GoKL bus service through cashless payment.

Starting Jan 1, foreigners will need to pay RM1 per trip.

During the announcement of Budget 2024, Kamarulzaman said DBKL expected to earn RM2mil in revenue from the move.

He added that based on statistics, 46% of those using the service were foreigners.

Liquor ban lifted

After almost two years in limbo, Chinese medical halls and sundry shops were informed that they could continue to sell hard liquor as long as they applied to renew their licences.

The chairman of the Excise Licensing Board of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur (ELBKL), Dr Ronald Pua had said that as long as businesses adhered to regulations, they would be permitted to sell alcoholic beverages.

Pua clarified that there was no blanket prohibition on liquor sales as applications were evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

In its initial meeting on Nov 23, ELBKL renewed 1,519 liquor licence applications, including those from Chinese medical halls and convenience stores.

This decision effectively reversed a 2021 ruling by the

Federal Territories ministry, which had prohibited outlets like sundry shops, convenience stores and Chinese medical halls from selling hard liquor.

Good news for motorists

The new elevated highway from Jalan Maarof to Jalan Semantan finally opened on July 1 after a three-year delay.

The 1.34km highway is part of an alternative route for motorists coming from Petaling Jaya heading to the capital city, considerably alleviating traffic congestion at the stretch.

The multi-million ringgit project started in December 2017 and was supposed to have opened in 2020 but the completion date kept getting pushed back.

In a bid to promote more pedestrian-friendly roads, the foodie haven of Jalan Alor in Bukit Bintang has gone car-free at night. Since July 1, the street has been closed to vehicular traffic from 6pm to 3am daily.

Viral moments

A long-standing land encroachment issue in Taman Desa involving DBKL and 14 residents along Jalan Bukit Desa 1 came to a head this year.

A resident, Datuk Edmund Lim, blocked a section of the road in front of his house in response to what he claimed was DBKL's inaction over numerous complaints that the road was built on part of his land.

While the affected homeowners want DBKL to return their respective portions, the local authority is set to initiate legal proceedings to acquire the land.

Shoppers also made a beeline for The Exchange TRX in Jalan Tun Razak, Kuala Lumpur's latest mall, which opened its doors on Nov 29.

This retail component of the Tun Razak Exchange development has 400 stores spanning 120,773sqm of net lettable area.