

# Taking back the City

The Malay Mail 4/6/12

FEDERAL TERRITORIES and Urban Wellbeing Minister Datuk Seri Raja Nong Chik tells TERENCE FERNANDEZ and MOHD AZRIL ANNUAR about his game plan for Kuala Lumpur and how he hopes to help the Barisan Nasional recapture the city.

**The Malay Mail:** You have the unenviable task of delivering the votes for Barisan Nasional in Kuala Lumpur. So are there a lot of political considerations when you do your job?

**Raja Nong Chik:** Elections are part and parcel of the system. Just enjoy what you're doing and your intentions must be pure. Then leave it to the people to decide. Don't just do it for the elections. I've always been working hard.

The thing is, one must be consistent. I try to squeeze in nine holes of golf once a week.

People ask me "still got time to play golf ah?" I said I don't want to pretend. Elections I become different, after elections, I am different.

**MM:** Recent developments ... regarding Datuk S. Ambiga, the burger stall owners.

There are accusations of lax action by City Hall against Ikhlās for setting up the stalls.

**RNC:** If Ambiga or residents complain then DBKL should enforce the by-laws.

Ikhlās had been doing a lot of things on the ground which DBKL is also not happy about.

The Opposition say they are planted by Umno but we have no relationship with Ikhlās. If they break the by-laws DBKL must take action.

**MM:** The spirit of the whole incident is to give Ambiga a taste of her own medicine.

**RNC:** We have always championed the traders but what I'm trying to say they're not Umno planted. They don't go on party basis and I don't know them. When I met the association of traders they weren't there also. I think they're a new group.

**MM:** So are City Hall personnel ready for riot control?

**RNC:** No, they have the Peaceful Assembly Act. We have to allow people to voice their opinions but in an area that is conducive ... a stadium on smaller crowd in an open area.

Even in the Act, some areas like Dataran Merdeka is a no go. So there must also be some element of crowd control. DBKL officers



need to understand how to go about it. How to enforce. What is legal, what isn't. And then the humanitarian aspect.

**MM:** Isn't it encroaching into policing?

**RNC:** For instance Dataran, we're the first group entrusted by the government to handle the students. We have to learn how to handle.

There's also the human elements, psychological elements and what needs to be done. Enforcing on hawkers, parking, traffic, so on is different.

It's a learning curve for them.

Sometimes we want to move squatters, there are also small scale protest. So they must learn how to handle all these. In the past they might rough them up and make them move, but that's not the right way.

They have to learn the soft approach, more about human psychology.

They have to consider the people involved and the NGOs who are keen to protect them for political reasons or whatsoever.

We encountered them in Kampung Kerinchi. If we just bulldozed through people will get angry. So I think when it comes to the small protests, the police will say "leave it to DBKL".

**MM:** It's a difficult portfolio because you're dealing with so many different groups of people. Some are extremely rich and some are on the other hand those who are living in DBKL flats and in the fringes of urban poverty.

How do you prioritise these various groups to ensure that no one is left behind?

**RNC:** I think first, I have to focus on the majority which comes from the working class, the poor. Nationwide the poorer 30-40 per cent, KL also has 40 per cent. The blue collar workers, those earning RM3,000 and below must be looked after.

You cannot be a world-class city when half the population feel out of place.

They must also enjoy the ben-

efits of world-class city.

I devoted 25 years dealing with the poorer classes of all races. They feel left out sometimes. That is one reason BN always lose in the cities, especially KL. They feel left out.

They see highways, they see LRT and big malls but they don't feel that they benefit of it. They only feel the strain of the cost of living and a clear example of Pantai Dalam is the New Pantai Expressway (NPE) right in the middle of Pantai Dalam, making their lives difficult, having to make u-turns here and there.

And during traffic jams, just to send their children to school nearby will take hours because of the traffic jams. But somebody is enjoying the infrastructure because the NPE highway is there. But they are suffering.

The people from Subang Jaya will benefit but the people in Pantai Dalam don't.

Sometimes our free tuition classes' response isn't good because parents just don't have the time to send the children because of the jam.

So these are the people who feel left out and part of my programmes is to give them ownership of the city. Even developers I always tell them: "You want to develop a certain number of big projects but you must always share it with the neighbours".

This is what I told MRCB in KL Sentral. I told MRCB, "I know you are EPF shareholders and all that but Brickfields is your neighbour you must learn to engage your neighbours. Don't expect the government to engage with your neighbours. Do a bit of community service, there are so many NGO there."

But some developers don't see the need to do so. They say: "Oh I got the approval from the government, it's up to the government to handle".

And then we are always at the forefront and there are politicians who will say "Oh! This is cronyism because we are at the front trying to enforce it".

So now for new developments I made it a point the develop-

ers must have a community strategy which engages with their neighbours and community.

**MM:** So this policy that you have introduced, any new development coming into the urban areas and FT areas, they have to first present a proposal as to how they are going to engage the community?

**RNC:** Yes, there are three stages — before the project commences they have to show what they have done; during construction where the roads are noisy and a lot of things can happen and finally is post construction.

**MM:** All other developed nations' world-class cities have many parks. Are we going to see more of that now?

**RNC:** Oh yes! DBKL has already developed 16 parks in various residential areas.

It's not enough because we have about 12 per cent and world standard is 16 per cent. We are also upgrading Taman Tasik Perdana now called Taman Botani. And we are doing Taman Rimba Lembah Pantai which is about 70 to 80 hectares.

**MM:** Each time there's some development, the immediate reaction is protest regardless of any benefit. They will think about that later. It's a "not in my backyard" mentality. Look at Lynas, nobody outside Kuantan is complaining about it.

**RNC:** True, similarly in KL, they want the MRT but "not in my backyard".

**MM:** There must come a time even the authorities must put their foot down and say: "No this is for the benefit of the larger sections of society and if it has to be there". But then again, politically it won't be prudent.

**RNC:** There are some groups who will use this as an issue. A classic example is the Kampung Kerinchi Development. Majority of the people have been staying in the low cost flats for almost 40 years. When I was a youth leader back in early 90s. It was already an issue for redevelopment. But they couldn't get the right developer and the right circumstances to move. So they never moved.

In the end when we tendered

out the development and this developer was the most possible and a lot of people and 92 per cent agreed to develop to the terms and conditions and left only that eight per cent and that eight per cent "you know who" has encouraged them to protest and brought in NGOs and Permas into the picture.

But I stand firm, I said I go with the majority. Fortunately the court was also with the majority. Somehow you have to stand firm on what the majority wants. Otherwise nothing will move.

And some are taking advantage. They want something more. For example this group besides using politics to protest they are asking for more. I told the developer, you give this group just to satisfy them, you have to give to the rest, the other 92 per cent.

**MM:** But here lies rather a big problem for you because there's a huge burden on your shoulders, representing the party in KL where all but one seat has gone to the other side. Of course you have a political mandate and task to win back the other ten seats that have been lost in 08. But because of the issues being brought up for instance in Kampung Kerinchi and Lembah Pantai and now you've got Kampung Baru issues also coming up. The Chinese issues in Bukit Bintang and surrounding areas, the foreign migration issues in Brickfields and Chow Kit and Petaling Street, and of course overall development, crime reduction, poverty eradication ... it must be tough. How are you tackling it?

**RNC:** It is definitely a tough. You must keep your head above water that means don't get too bogged down by the many issues. Just focus on areas where you feel like you can do something. If you want to tackle all issues, you can't tackle all issues.

We talk about elections, KL is one area where there are some areas historically has always been with the Opposition, regardless of tsunami or not. Without tsunami also lost. So those areas, those DAP, Opposition areas, some of the MPs are very friendly with me because they feel they have no point hitting me.

I also say what for hit me? Be-

cause they're going to win anyway. But there are some areas where things are moving in the right direction but whether or not enough to win the support of the voters is yet to be seen. But I'm confident we're going to win back some seats.

**MM:** You're a senator, which means you do not have a constituent base like for example "I have 10,000 voters here, I take care of them, they take care of me".

But in your case you don't have that base yet because you came in as an administrator. Do you feel additional pressure on yourself, not political survival but to deliver the goods and also to ensure that you will also be here for the long run?

**RNC:** Not really because I've been involved in grassroots politics for more than 25 years. So I've been dealing on grassroots issues but the platform was Umno because I didn't have a government post for the last 25 years or more.

So as I say, even though I am more of a corporate businessman, on my other activities, I did a lot of political work at the grassroots level. I already have a constituent base I was working with but I just didn't contest in elections.

I don't feel pressured for political survival. I have to prove and do more than others... I feel I have to do because it's my "amanah" and my job... to do my job to the best of my ability as a professional because I'm a professional.

And to me what is important, why I feel quite reasonably comfortable is because I've already dealt with the grassroots for the past 25 years. And I've also dealt with all the government servants as long as that as well, especially DBKL. They know me very well. I go on certain issues, I see them sometimes 25 to 30 times on one issue.

And people in Lembah Pantai know me. I go up and down to see these people many times when they were younger and were a lot more junior.

But there are many challenges on KL, so many things. That's why I have to focus on a few areas and I can't settle everyone's problems and tackle the main issues first.

Hopefully, that'll help not only me in the future election but other areas as well.

• TOMORROW: Working with the Opposition in KL