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AS THE capital city, Kuala Lumpur initially functioned as the nation's trade, government, financial and judicial hub.

However, decentralisation caused people to move out of its inner city area to new townships.

Over time, these shifts and the administrative capital moving to Putrajaya led to many of Kuala Lumpur's historical buildings being left vacant and decaying. The capital needed rejuvenation and to be repurposed.

With this in mind, urban regeneration organisation Think City started a city restoration project that was formalised in 2019 as the Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District (KLCCD) strategic masterplan.

Think City managing director Datuk Hamdan Abdul Majeed told *StarMetro* that the masterplan was to give Kuala Lumpur a new purpose as a cultural and creativity hub.

Its main focus is to restore historical buildings and introduce new activities in the city.

"We get various stakeholders to regenerate the city together, through grants and programmes," he said.

One initiative spearheaded by Think City is the Creative Kuala Lumpur Grants Programme designed to revitalise and transform the historical city centre into a creative, liveable and thriving hub.

Focus areas

The KLCCD unifies various localities in Kuala Lumpur with the downtown area, with major landmarks such as Dataran Merdeka and Masjid Jamek as its core focus.

Outside the core zone is the buffer zone, where landmarks like Merdeka 118 and Kampung Attap are situated.

The city's iconic parks, including Taman Tugu and Perdana Botanical Gardens, are also

Regenerated Lorong Bandar 11 with a cute mural (left).



Performers entertaining crowds at Pentas Seni Merdeka, one of the highlights of the Kreatif KL Festival.

Taking Kuala Lumpur to greater artistic heights

Through conservation, greening and cultural activities, the capital is being rejuvenated as creative hub



An overview of the Pentas Seni Merdeka event beside Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad, which is one of the highlights of Kreatif KL Festival. — Photos: LEW GUAN XI/The Star and courtesy of Think City.

within this zone.

Downtown Kuala Lumpur forms the core of the masterplan and is made up of five precincts: Civic Precinct, Petaling Street Precinct, Heritage Triangle Precinct, Education Precinct and Traditional Shopping Precinct (see graphic).

Some areas that have been successfully regenerated, according to Hamdan, are Kwai Chai Hong (an alley off Jalan Panggung), Jalan Tun HS Lee (between Jalan Tun Perak and Jalan Gereja) and Lorong Bandar 11 in Lebu Pudu (a lane that leads from Central Market to the Sin Sze Si Ya Temple).

These areas have reportedly benefitted from Think City

grants to rejuvenate and reactivate public spaces in the city.

The installation of green connectors have also been done throughout the KLCCD precincts.

One of the project highlights this year, Hamdan said, was the restoration of Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad, which was built in the late 19th century and housed the British colonial administration offices.

"Conservation efforts will be led by Khazanah Nasional and Think City will be assisting.

"The surrounding area will have various art installations, performances and events.

"One such effort is the Pentas Seni Merdeka event," he said.

A Khazanah spokesperson said

the ongoing redevelopment of Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad was being carried out in phases, with the first expected to be completed by 2026.

"The goal of the project is to ensure the original identity of historic buildings is preserved so that they can remain relevant for the future while adding appeal for visitors," the spokesperson said in a statement to *StarMetro*.

In his Budget 2025 speech on Oct 18, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said Khazanah had allocated RM600mil to conserve the iconic landmark as well as Carcosa Seri Negara.

"The seeds of regeneration we

planted have started to bloom. People can now see art galleries in downtown Kuala Lumpur as well as changes across places such as the Central Market," Hamdan highlighted.

With the completion of the restoration projects, he suggested that the masterplan be expanded to restore historical buildings.

"We want to kick-start and catalyse the process of change through grants and collaboration with Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL)."

He acknowledged there was room for improvement in terms of the city's walkability and public infrastructure as more visitors and investments were coming in.

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Izan Satrina: Festival theme aligns with the vision of Kuala Lumpur as a city of confluence.



(Above) Tourists having their photo taken at Kwai Chai Hong in Chinatown. (Right) A youngster playing traditional drum is part of the charm at 'Songket and Limar' textile exhibition.

ensure we have adequate and supportive last-mile infrastructure to ensure the masterplan's success," he said.

Adding cultural value

To build on the masterplan's momentum, Think City launched Kreatif KL Festival in September.

"Various activities such as art shows, performances and theatres planned under the festival will stimulate the city's reactivation," said Hamdan.

The inaugural festival, ongoing until Nov 30, features over 100 programmes with the aim of transforming downtown Kuala Lumpur into an artistic and cultural hub.

Set against the backdrop of Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad, Pentas Seni Merdeka is hosting various cultural performances.

One of the highlights is a textile exhibition titled "Songket and Limar" showcasing 250 brocades and silks along with fashion shows, workshops

Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District flagships

Dataran Merdeka Heritage Area (Civic Precinct)

Masjid Jamek Enclave (Civic Precinct and Traditional Shopping Precinct)

Trade Quadrant (Heritage Triangle Precinct)

Fashion and Textile (Traditional Shopping Precinct)

Carcosa Seri Negara (Botanical Gardens)

Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara (Merdeka 118)

Memorial Tun Abdul Razak (Botanical Gardens)

Kuala Lumpur Train Station

Source: Think City *TheStar*graphics



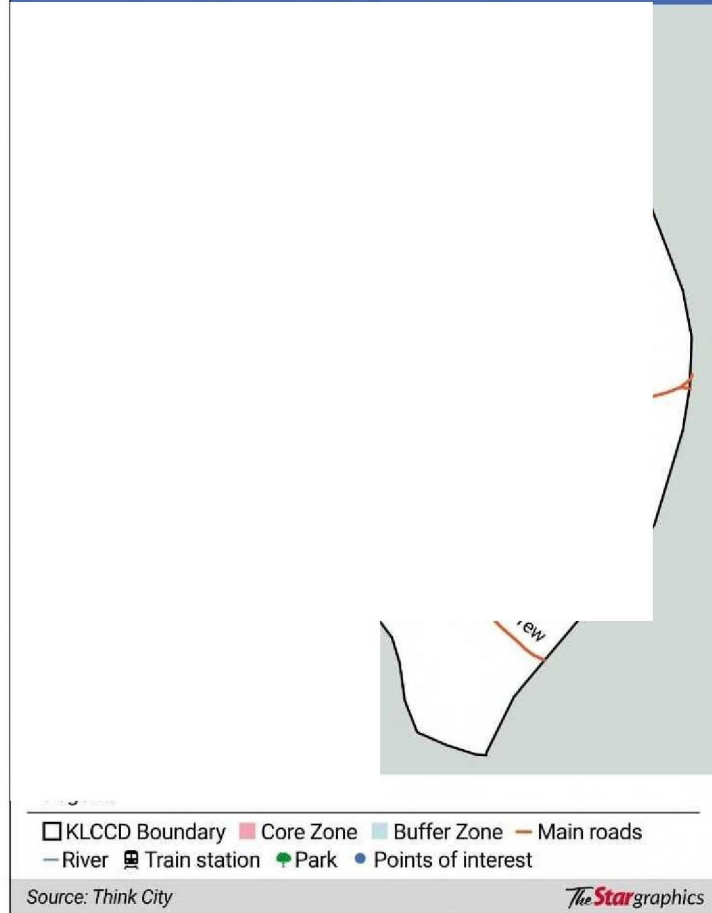
and performances.

Art installations done by various agencies such as Malaysian Institute of Arts are also part of festivities.

Think City senior director Izan Satrina Mohd Sallehuddin said the festival was a key element in positioning Kuala Lumpur as a creative destination that drew visitors through emotional connections and unique experiences.

"The Kreatif KL placemaking and destination strategy revolves

Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District (KLCCD)



around showcasing the depth of Kuala Lumpur's offerings, sending a clear message that this city is rich in culture, creativity and history," she said.

Izan Satrina said the festival's theme, "Meet Me in KL", also aligned with the vision of Kuala Lumpur as a city of "confluence".

"This theme reflects the merging of history, people, cultures and ideas.

"The energy and emotion of a place are essential in ensuring that people visit not just for the architectural landscape but also to experience vibrant life within these spaces," she said.

She added that 85% of the

events featured in the festival had already been booked, with Pentas Seni Merdeka attracting up to 11,000 visitors per day.

"With support from Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif, we are working towards gaining a spot in the Unesco Creative Cities Network next year, with a long-term goal of gaining a World Heritage Site for the historic core of the city," said Izan Satrina.

Like other creative districts worldwide, she said Kuala Lumpur needed a distinct narrative, which was why Think City – supported by DBKL and Finance Ministry – was investing in storytelling and cultural branding.