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THIS year has been particularly challenging for Kuala Lumpur with some unsettling incidents that rocked the nation and grabbed headlines overseas.

Sinkholes and fallen trees brought traffic in the capital to a standstill and in some cases, even claimed lives.

The city grappled with disruptions that tested the resilience of its people and the authorities.

However, amid the gloom, there was also some bright spots as the city saw the launch of Merdeka 118 tower, the tallest in South-East Asia and second tallest in the world.

Kuala Lumpur also welcomed its first female mayor and received various accolades and recognition.

Dangers in the city

When an 8m-deep sinkhole swallowed up 48-year-old Vijaya Lakshmi Gali, a tourist from India, on Jalan Masjid India on Aug 23, it grabbed headlines the world over.

Even after a nine-day search-and-rescue operation, her remains were never found.

Five days after that incident, another sinkhole appeared 50m away from the first. This prompted the authorities to close the entire street.

Kuala Lumpur's new mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif had said that repairs of the approximately 200m affected stretch of Jalan Masjid India would take three to six months.

Subsequently on Nov 20, a stretch of road from the police beat to a small lane between business premises at Jalan Masjid India was reopened.

However, the area around the Wisma Melayu complex where the sinkhole appeared remains closed.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) reportedly said that the whole stretch of road was expected to be reopened by the end of the year.

Earlier on May 7, a large tree



Second sinkhole about 50m from the first incident in Masjid India which cost the life of a tourist.

Merdeka 118 a shining beacon added to the Kuala Lumpur skyline.

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Govt grapple with sinkholes while new mayor aspires in areas



estimated to be more than 50 years old fell in Jalan Sultan Ismail, crushing vehicles and damaging the overhead monorail track following a downpour.

The incident killed a man and injured two others, and caused severe disruptions to the traffic and monorail services.

Similar incidents in Jalan Raja Chulan and Jalan Pinang not long after further intensified the fear among residents on their safety and the need for proper tree maintenance.

DBKL then identified 28 high-risk trees to be cut down, appointing 19 tree maintenance contractors across all parliamentary constituencies in the city.

Some activists, however, urged the authorities to not hastily cut down all huge and old trees, citing reasons like the need for a proper maintenance culture to prevent a repeat of such tragedies.

First female mayor

Maimunah, a former Penang Island mayor, created history when she became the first female mayor for Kuala Lumpur on Aug 14.

The urban planner had also spent six years as executive director of Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

On her first day in charge, she warned DBKL officers against soliciting and receiving bribes, and pledged to work with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to take action against corrupt officers.

She also called for the formation of a taskforce involving multiple agencies such as the police and Immigration Department to curb illegal activities such as prostitution and gambling in the city.

As she reached more than 100 days in office, she aspired to reshape Kuala Lumpur into a more inclusive and equitable city

through the proposed Urban Redevelopment Act (URA). She also vowed to improve walkability and public transport in the city.

Revitalising old areas

The government is advancing plans to redevelop and revitalise ageing areas in the capital with 139 sites earmarked for transformation under Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040.

This effort is to be facilitated by the URA which was unfortunately mired in controversy throughout the year.

One of the proposed provisions is the lowering of consent threshold by unit owners for redevelopment, where only 80% consent is required for buildings under 30 years old while 75% consent is required for buildings older than 30 years.

City folk raised fears of gentrification, displacement of low-income residents and possible

“land-grab” by developers if the URA is implemented.

One such issue is at 1Razak Mansion, once celebrated as Kuala Lumpur's flagship redevelopment success, where residents are reportedly struggling with increased maintenance fees.

Proponents, on the other hand, justified their stance, pointing to the URA's ability to grant residents larger and more modern units while ensuring the safety of old strata buildings.

Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming said in Parliament on Oct 21 that the proposed URA could provide stronger protection for homeowners' rights and interests. It is expected to be tabled next year.

ROL delayed

Launched in 2011, the River of Life (ROL) project did not meet its objectives that included improving river water quality to



Showing good cooperation between DBKL and Federal Government are (in yellow vests, from left) Maimunah, Nga and Dr Zaliha participating in World Cleanup Day 2024 around Pasar Seni.

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Class IIB (suitable for recreational use with body contact), and its deadline this year, according to Auditor-General's (AG) Report 2/2024 findings.

Despite this delay, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa said in July that the progress of the project was at 81%.

She said the total cost of the ROL project was RM4.36bil, whereby RM3.3bil was allocated for the cleaning component while RM1.06bil was for river beautification.

Three projects have been retendered while six have been cancelled.

Based on land revaluation conducted by Valuation and Property Services Department last year, Dr Zaliha said ROL land had appreciated by 87%.

Earlier this month, the government scrapped five of the 12 outstanding ROL projects deemed “less significant” towards achieving ROL's objectives.



1Razak Mansion, part of Kuala Lumpur's urban redevelopment.



Iconic Masjid Jamek at the meeting point of Sungai Klang (right) and Sungai Gombak (left) which are part of the River of Life project.

Retention pond development

The construction of a housing project around Kampung Bohol flood retention pond has met with objections by stakeholders, who said the pond is a crucial flood mitigation site.

However, a developer has been awarded the tender to upgrade the pond and construct affordable housing around it.

The plan is to upgrade the retention pond to address flash floods, create more affordable houses for the low-income group and for its residents to enjoy the pond's landscape.

In June, Kinrara residents in Puchong, Selangor, which is near Bohol pond, called for an explanation on the land deal as the premium is below market value.

The Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur Lands and Mines Office (PTGWP) said the premium for the six plots of land with a 99-year lease was calculated based on a formula given by the Valuation and Property Services Department (JPPH).

The calculation was based on a formula in Rule 8(b)(i) of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur Land Rules 1995.

Language issues

DBKL enforcement officers took action on businesses and removed their signage that did not prioritise words in Bahasa Malaysia.

When responding to their dissatisfaction, the local authority clarified that enforcement was aimed at upholding the national language.

Dr Zaliha also urged the public to focus on more important agenda.

Accolades for KL city

This year, Kuala Lumpur has won multiple accolades that boosted the city's popularity.

The capital has been ranked the second most outstanding city in South-East Asia, behind Singapore, in the Oxford Economics Global Cities Index 2024.

It also upstaged more popular cities such as Las Vegas (US) in a recent survey, taking the 18th spot in a list of 37 world's best cities.

Besides that, Kuala Lumpur was also the fifth most popular international destination in the first half of 2024, after Tokyo, Bangkok, Osaka and Seoul, according to digital travel platform Agoda's booking data.

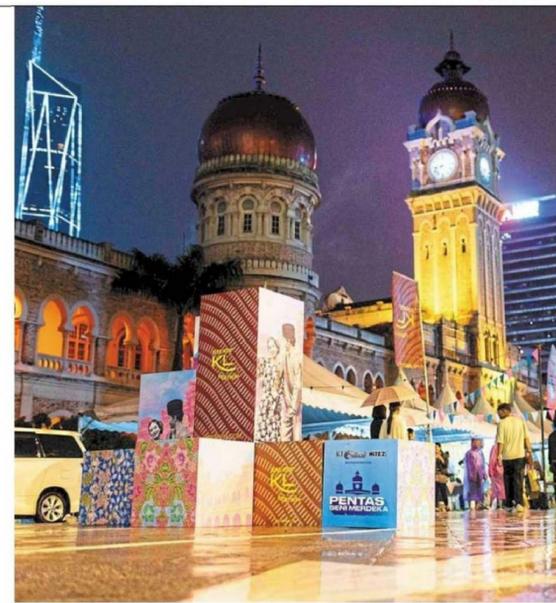
Creative strategy

Think City, an impact organisation delivering on urban policy advisory and projects, started a city restoration project called Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District (KLCCD).

It is a strategic masterplan to give Kuala Lumpur a new purpose as a cultural and creativity hub and to restore historical buildings and introduce new activities in the city.

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.

The Creative KL Grants Programme was introduced for groups to pitch their ideas on ways to revitalise and transform the historical city centre into a creative, liveable and thriving hub.



Pentas Seni Merdeka event, one of the highlights of Kreatif KL Festival, and part of the Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District (KLCCD) strategic masterplan.



Rescue teams in action cutting the fallen tree in Jalan Sultan Ismail to free trapped drivers.



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