

**CULTURAL IDENTITY AND URBAN CHANGE IN**  
**SOUTHEAST ASIA – KUALA LUMPUR**

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## **1.0 FORMATION AND GROWTH OF PRE-INDEPENDENCE – KUALA LUMPUR.**

### **1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

To begin to understand Kuala Lumpur one must look at its historical context with particular reference to other urban areas in the Malay archipelago namely, Melaka, Penang and Singapore. In comparison, the history of Kuala Lumpur is relatively short and recent. Kuala Lumpur's prominence coming into being only with the setting up of a seat for the British Resident, who until 1879 was located at Klang, the old capital of Selangor.

The Portuguese set up Melaka in 1511 as a medieval fortification during the reign of King Manuel II of Spain. At the time of conquest, Melaka was already a flourishing city of commerce described thus by the Portuguese visitor Tome Pires (1)

In 1641 the Dutch relying on the support and reconnaissance from Batavia defeated the Portuguese to start the next era of Colonial conquest until their eventual displacement by the British in (1795 or 1818). The British had earlier on in 1786 seize Penang under a treaty from the Sultanate of Kedah. They were to acquire Singapore in 1819 as a further extension of their trade thrust eastward by the East India Company. Under the British, Penang, Melaka and Singapore known then as the Straits Settlements became important ports. They became the seat of British Colonial powers. Within their framework Penang including Province Wellesley and Melaka had British Resident Commissioners to administer their affairs whilst Singapore named a Colony, had a Governor. (2)

(1) Taken from *The Opening of the Malay World to European Trade in the Sixteenth Century* by Kenneth R. Hall

“Malacca is a city that was made for merchandise, fitter than any other in the world; the end of the monsoons and the beginning of others. Malacca is surrounded and lies in the middle, and the trade and commerce between the different nations for a thousand leagues on every hand must come to Malacca.”

(2) The Colony of Singapore administratively included Christmas Isles and the Cocos-Keeling group of islands at South Indian Ocean. Melaka included the Island of Labuan off the coast of North Borneo later to be incorporated with the Colony of North Borneo (later Sabah) only to become another Federal Territory of Malaysia in 1987, Kuala Lumpur being the other Federal Territory

Whilst the Straits Settlements flourished and became very wealthy Kuala Lumpur remain very much a backwash of Klang. It was an 'outpost' for tin-mining. The Straits Settlements became important centre for commerce, education, trade, urbanization and rapid development.

### **1.2 FOUNDING OF KUALA LUMPUR**

At the time of Kuala Lumpur coming into being, the Malay Peninsula was essentially divided into three (3) economic zones of influence; Kedah and Perak were under Penang, Selangor and Negri Sembilan under Melaka; whilst Johor and the entire eastern part of the Malay Peninsula Kelantan, Trengganu and Pahang were dependent upon Singapore.

However, Melaka's importance as the leading port had by then overtaken by Penang and Singapore.

Other than trading in spices, the main growth-activities in the Federated Malay States were rubber plantation and mining in and around Kuala Lumpur namely Sungai Ujong, Lukut and the Klang Valley. It was the movement of these mining workers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century which established Kuala Lumpur.

### 1.3 KUALA LUMPUR AS A SETTLEMENT

- a) By 1857 there was already a settlement of Sumatran Malays in the vicinity of Jalan Silang. Kuala Lumpur translated means 'muddy estuary' of two rivers the Klang and Gombak rivers. At the junction of the estuary is built the oldest mosque Masjid Jamie Jamek. The resulting rivalry between Sumatran Malays and the Bugis (seafarers from Makassar, Sulawesi) culminated in the Selangor Civil War of 1866 and the settlement of Kuala Lumpur was badly damaged and almost abandoned.

Other Chinese prospectors from Negri Sembilan joined in the fray by supporting Raja Mahadi to attack Kuala Lumpur in 1870. In 1872 Capitan China Yap Ah Loy and Kuala Lumpur came under siege by Raja Mahadi. Yap Ah Loy whose predecessors had sided with the Sultan and Raja Abdullah in the earlier dispute was assisted by Tengku Kudin; who was then in control of Ulu Yam, Rawang, Kuala Kubu and Serendah (Districts to the North of K.L.). Tengku Kudin together with the help of Bendahara Wan Ahmad of Pahang and some Englishman succeeded in defeating Raja Mahadi in March 1873. This heralded the start of British influence in Selangor.

- b) TOWN OF KUALA LUMPUR

After the defeat of the Sumatrans, Yap Ah Loy set about rebuilding the town of Kuala Lumpur. From 1874 – 1885 he controlled the economy of Kuala Lumpur. Law and order was maintained by Yap Ah Loy. The town grew with no proper planning.

### 1.4 BRITISH RESIDENCY

Until 1880 when the British Resident moved to Kuala Lumpur, all administrative, judiciary, Public Works and Survey department matters were all attended to by, as part of the combined duties of the magistrate periodically sent there in late 1879. The relocation of the Residency to Kuala Lumpur saw law and order; and proper town Administration. It prompted the growth of Kuala Lumpur together with the influx of British Colonials eager to exploit the resources available in the then Malay States. Roads, railways, postal services, telegraphs, telephone, electricity, piped water, health care etc; spread out from Kuala Lumpur to link Penang to the north and Singapore to the south. To a large extent the growth and importance of Kuala Lumpur being inland was due to the road linkage. (3) It became a centre.

Kuala Lumpur's further rise in importance, in difference to the British dominance was the formation of the Federated Malay States in 1895, when it was selected to be its headquarters. This was to pave the way for Kuala Lumpur's emergence as the Capital for Malaya and subsequently Malaysia.

Growth of Kuala Lumpur was accelerated due to wealth generating mining activities around it. This made development of the new town relatively easy. Increased economic activity attracted both European and Asians to the growing community.

By 1887 there were 518 brick houses in Kuala Lumpur. Some semblance of planning was introduced and the survey plan of Kuala Lumpur and Environs produced by the Selangor Survey Department in 1889 showed the basic structure for the growth plans of modern Kuala Lumpur.

Kuala Lumpur assumed a cosmopolitan character becoming the centre for recreation, entertainment, sports, education, and religion as well as being the Administrative Centre of the Resident-General. Planters flocked to popular establishments in Kuala Lumpur to get away from the plantations and to savour the comforts provided.

(3) In 1889 there were only 51  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles of good roads from K.L. by 1901 there over 600 miles.

## 1.5 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

It was only a matter of time after the rebuilding of the whole town by the British, that the Sanitary Board was formed in 1890 to regulate and maintain streets and drains; and to ensure proper growth. 1921 saw the formal introduction of Town Planning to Kuala Lumpur and a Town Plan prepared in 1939 and gazetted to control urban growth for a town of "an area of 11 square miles" (4), with a population of approximately 50,000. By 1947, the population had grown to 176,000.

The functions of the Sanitary Board were taken over by the setting up of the Municipality for Kuala Lumpur in 1948. After the amendment to the Municipality for Kuala Lumpur Act, the First election of representatives to the new Municipal Council was in 1952.

## **2.0 KUALA LUMPUR THE FEDERAL CAPITAL OF MALAYSIA**

### 2.1 POST-INDEPENDENCE (1957), KUALA LUMPUR.

With Independence in 1957, the Federation of Malaya constitution provided for the Municipality of K.L. to become the Federal Capital under the Federal Capital Act 1960. The status of City of Kuala Lumpur was bestowed on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1972. An agreement concluded between the State of Selangor and the Federal Government established Kuala Lumpur as the Federal territory of Kuala Lumpur on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1974. The Lord Mayor was the chief Administrator for Kuala Lumpur, a city which has grown from 36 square miles in 1970 to 94 square miles in February 1974. The current population of Kuala Lumpur of 1.5 million expected to touch 2.0 million by 2000.

The choice of Kuala Lumpur to be the Federal Capital was a logical geographical decision, located centrally on the Peninsula, connected to Penang, Melaka and Singapore by road and rail linkages; and the coastal port of Port Klang (formerly Port Swettenham).

Since its settlement in 1857, and after the British intervention in 1870s, there were constructed some grand imposing Buildings e.g. the General Post Office, the State Secretariat, Commercial Buildings, e.g. the Loke Chow Kit's departmental store (now the Industrial Court), Hongkong Shanghai Building, the Selangor Club premises, the St. Mary's church, Loke Chow Kit's Residence (now the PAM building – Malaysian Institute of Architect's Building) etc; which became a good basic for the new nation to work from. All Government departments and Ministries were centralized in K.L.

(4) (page 13 A Guide to K.L. Notable Buildings by PAM 1976)

The development of Petaling Jaya, satellite Township to the South West of Kuala Lumpur as a residential and industrial centre contributed very much to the growth of Kuala Lumpur as a Federal territory. It started a trend – the deurbanation of Kuala Lumpur and Kuala Lumpur's subsequent growth and sprawl. Prior to this period most inhabitants lived in the urban centre and periphery of Kuala Lumpur, above shophouses, the more affluent in bungalows or semi-detached dwellings and Government employees in government quarters laid out on spacious compounds. Residential Areas of Kuala Lumpur were restricted to the Jalan Ampang, Jalan Pekeliling (Circular Road), Jalan Sultan Ismail (Parry Road), Jalan P. Ramlee (Traicher Road), Jalan Raja Chulan (Weld Road), Jalan Imbi, lower Jalan Bukit Bintang, Jalan Kia Peng, Jalan Selatan enclaves. Senior government servants were housed at the Bukit Petaling and Lake Gardens enclaves, others attached to the public utilities and public transport were housed nearer their place of employment, e.g. Brickfields and Sentul for the Malayan Railways employees.

Following the success of Petaling Jaya, private developers got into the act of providing private housing to cope with the growth and demand. Many new housing schemes were developed near Kuala Lumpur. The 1960s and 1970s saw major growth in Kuala Lumpur. A new dual carriage highway linking the newly founded satellite city of Petaling Jaya built in the early 60's was completely obsolete by the early 70's and had since been upgraded and expanded to become an eight-lane highway by the late 80's.

## 2.2 POST-1969 KUALA LUMPUR

In tracing Kuala Lumpur's growth, 1969 must be noted as an important benchmark for intervention which injected further impetus towards Kuala Lumpur's rapid expansion both economically and physically. As the Selangor Civil War of 1866 badly damaged the settlement of Kuala Lumpur but indirectly provided the excuse for British intervention, the racial riots of 1969 between the Malays and Chinese saw the introduction of numerous legislations and laws which effectively paved the way for much of the developments in present-day Kuala Lumpur.

After Independence in 1957, the newly independent Federation of Malaya together with North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore, united in 1963 to form Malaysia. As an entity it survived until Singapore pulled out in 1965 by mutual agreement. During the early years of nationhood of a society consisting of people from different cultural background and religious beliefs there was much adjustments needed to create a comfortable balance.

Political aspirations and euphoria accompanying the recent Independence overflowed into local politics. With everyone trying to secure themselves political niches, usually along racial sentiments resulted in the formation of numerous opposition parties to the challenge the ruling Government formed by the Alliance Party, a composite of the three (3) major

racial groupings namely the UMNO (United Malay National Organisation), MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress).

In the 1969 Elections the predominantly Chinese dominated political party DAP (Democratic Action Party) an affiliated associate of the PAP (Peoples Action Party) of Singapore won major seats in the Malaysian Parliament and in the State Assembly of Selangor. This sudden polarization of racial groups caused the flare-up of a short-lived commotion in Kuala Lumpur. Due to swift action by the Government and the unbiased stance of the Police Force it was brought under control with minimal loss of life. Realizing the disparity of wealth existing between the Chinese and the Malays (bumiputra – literally translated it means, ‘prince of the soil’) the Government introduced the First Outline Progressive Plan (OPP1) and the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) for implementation 1971 – 1990. Under this programme, the Urban Development Authority (UDA) was established in 1971 to complement other government or semi government agencies charged with the implementation of the New Economic Policy. UDA was to play a major role in restructuring the urban identity and growth of Kuala Lumpur. Other agencies entrusted with the OPP1 were MARA, PERNAS to name the two major ones.

### 2.3 UDA

UDA’s main role was to implement government policy and to ensure that it filtered down to the grass-root. Its main objective being: -

- a) to increase bumiputra property ownership in terms of stock and value; and
- b) the provision of commercial premises for bumiputra in strategic urban areas.

As spelt out in the Act, under section Part II Clause 3(1) UDA was to (5)

- a) to promote and carry out projects in urban development areas for:
  - i) development, redevelopment settlement, resettlement and public housing; and
  - ii) improvement in environment, services amenities, traffic circulation, vehicle parking, recreational and community facilities and other public improvements for the promotion of National Unity, health, safety, convenience and welfare; and
- b) to promote and carry out projects in urban development areas with a view to achieve the distribution of opportunities among the various Races in the fields of commerce and industry, housing and other activities;
- c) to translate into action-programmes the governments policy to “restructure society through urban development.”

It was a massive order and task. The success and level of achievement of UDA was subjected to the leadership of the Agency and degree of dedication, responsibility and competence of Executives within. UDA was major player in many projects in Kuala Lumpur. By virtue of its structure and power it could often ‘over-rule’ and ‘over-ride’ the authority of DBKL (Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur, - City Hall of Kuala Lumpur) over planning and development matters. By using “national unity’ and the “distribution of

opportunities” as the rationale for their actions. UDA was able to carry out urban restructuring exercises which under normal circumstances would have not being possible. UDA was able to participate compulsorily, with equity, in almost any project within Kuala Lumpur during this period. Planning in Kuala Lumpur’s urban growth had to be submitted to UDA for evaluation, comments and approval prior to application to DBKL for betting and approval. Many of Kuala Lumpur’s notable developments and buildings in the 70s and early 80s had UDA’s involvement and participation.

## 2.4 N E P (1971 –1990)

The NEP was set up as a plan designed as a “socio-economic-engineering” project which has never been used in any parts of the world. Its objectives were:

- i) restructuring of Malaysian Society – so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function:  
“The Plan incorporates a two-pronged New Economic Policy for development. The first prong is to reduce and eventual eradicate poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race. The second prong aims at accelerating the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function. This process involves the modernization of rural life, a rapid and balanced growth of urban activities and the creation of a Malay commercial and industrial community in all categories and at all levels of operation, so that Malays and other indigenous people will become full partners in all aspects of the economic life of the nation.”

“These policies and programmes will be implemented in such a manner that no one will be deprived of his rights, privileges, income, job or opportunity. Accordingly, to afford the necessary opportunities for more education, better jobs and higher incomes to the disadvantaged, the sum total of such opportunities open to all Malaysian must be expanded rapidly. This expansion is an essential element in the New Economic Policy”. (6)

(5) UDA – Urban Development Authority Act 1971, Part II, Clause 3(1)

(6) (from SMP – Second Malaysia Plan 1971 – 1975, Government printers, K.L. 1971 pg. 1 para 2);

- ii) the eradication of poverty, irrespective of race, was laid down as one of its other main aim.

## 3.0 KUALA LUMPUR’S PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

### 3.1 DEWAN BANDARAYA KUALA LUMPUR (DBKL) – City of Kuala Lumpur

During this period the City and later the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur was under the charge of three (3) Lord Mayors (Datuk Bandar)

February 1972 – May 1972  
July 1972 – February 1983

Datuk Bandar Tan Sri Lokman Yusoff;  
Datuk Bandar Tan Sri Yaacob Latiff;

February 1983 – September 1992

Datuk Bandar Tan Sri Dato Elyas Omar.

(Sample list of Notable Buildings constructed during the tenure of each Datuk Bandar is provided in Appendix A.)

The first Mayor Tan Sri Lokman Yusoff was appointed Commissioner Federal Capital in 1967 and became in 1972 commissioner of the City of Kuala Lumpur where he held his post for only three (3) months when he passed away. His successor Tan Sri Yaacob Latiff served as Mayor for over ten (10) years. Much of the building produced under his tenure were the result of UDA's input and generated from there.

Tan Sri Dato Elyas Omar compared to his predecessors was young when he took office. He proved to be an indefatigable worker and a man with vision. During his tenure of office, the Kuala Lumpur skyline was transformed dramatically, riding over the crest of economic 'boom' and into the trough of a recession! It did not halt the progress of making Kuala Lumpur into a garden City and also proclaimed a City of Lights.

The growth of Kuala Lumpur and its physical surrounds since Independence was a combined effort between the Government and local business entrepreneurs. Government effort and concentration was at the City Centre, whilst the spread of the suburban sprawl was very much in the hands of private developers. Immediately after the setting up of the new satellite town of Petaling Jaya, a major housing development scheme for bungalow lots was launched at the Bukit Tunku (formerly Kenny Hills). It was to be the forerunner of many such housing developments in years to come. By early 1960s the SOCFIN estate set aside a large tract of their oil palms at Damansara for a new housing estate, following similar lines to those of Bukit Tunku.

This was to become a township of its own called Damansara consisting of housing both low density and high density, recreational facilities, commercial centre, schools and other Institutional buildings, quite self sufficient. Other notable growth areas were the Taman Seputeh, 3rd mile Old Klang Road area (1967 – 71); Bangsar (1973), Taman Desa (1975), Cheras Area (1975), so forth; some were better laid out than others, had more facilities and well executed.

With the major thrust areas pushing at the seams of Kuala Lumpur, much oversight in planning by the local authority. Haphazard approvals given without due consideration given to the structural plan let alone the local plan. Often streets are left disjointed, unconnected or even discontinued as it transverse into adjoining developments due to topographic constraints. Lack of planning coordination was evident everywhere, these shortcomings are being painstakingly rectified presently at tremendous cost to the rate payers' coffer and extreme inconvenience to local residence.

Other evidence of ill-conceived schemes was the constant and regular flooding to main arterial roads of Kuala Lumpur due to torrential tropical rainfall. Due to lack of engineering understanding and concern, many natural water-courses and run-offs were deviated or obliterated by massive earthworks; or water from a development channeled into a single outlet, far too small to sustain the volume of water so diverted. Extensive programme by the Department of Irrigation and Drainage were carried out to enhance water discharge and flow from all major estuaries and streams linking into the Gombak and Klang rivers network.

Major road improvement schemes to the existing ring-road system around K.L. were carried out in the 1980's. Further improvements to major highways linking K.L. to surrounding towns, the airport, Port Klang, the new capital of Selangor Shah Alam and

new growth centres for housing contributed towards the increase in car ownership and car population of K.L. The proposed North-South highway which will ultimately link the northern-most state of Perlis to the southern-most state of Johore. This will further increase the current traffic loading on K.L.'s roads. Residents of K.L. are already bemoaning the fact that the traffic congestion appears to be as bad as those of some other Asean countries. (7)

(7) Berita Akitek February 1991 "Snails travel faster than cars in K.L."

### 3.2 CHANGING ATTITUDE AND TRENDS

The growth of Kuala Lumpur during this period is largely due to the sustained economic growth and the continued urbanization from the rural areas. The capital is seen as the economic centre for speedy growth in ones' financial situation. Its final physical manifestation is a direct result of the changing attitude towards the traditional values and the diminishing importance of the traditional extended family, to the western concept of the conjugal family unit. The physical transformation of Kuala Lumpur may be typified by studying three distinctive housing developments and growth areas which may be classified under the following periods: -

- a) 'Immediate post-independence' period, 1950's – 1963;
- b) 'Transitional' period, 1966 – 1973;
- c) 'Boon' period, 1976 – 1984;
- d) 'Condominium' period, 1988 – 1993.

### 3.3 a) IMMEDIATE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD, 1950'S – 1963, (The Kenny Hills development)

A section of north-western corner of K.L. was developed by the Anglo-Thai Cooperation during the early period of post Independence. The site was approximately 100 acres of hilly terrain with hardly any flat land. Any flat land within the vicinity of the hills were located at the foothills and belonged to the Harrisons and Crossfields Estates, and other land owners e.g. the Russell family, owners of the Boh plantations and Shell Company. The proposed development were at the upper hilly terrain and it sub-divided the whole site into large plots averaging between 40,000 – 60,000 square feet per housing lot. The land price then was, according to an original resident (8), at 7½ sen per sq. foot in early 1950's, and by 1956 it had risen to .35 sen per sq. foot, with a stated condition that a house to the value of not less than \$30,000 had to be built within 6 months of purchase. The distance of this development is not more than a mile from the G.P.O. at the Selangor Club padang which was then the central square of K.L.

Kenny hill is today Kuala Lumpur's elite residential area. Land price being valued at between RM60-80 psf. Many of the properties are sought after for the quality of its environment and its closeness to nature. The fact that nature features terrain and vegetation were not disturbed or destroyed during its development makes this suburb most salubrious and environmental friendly. The timelessness of its natural beauty with man living in harmony with nature is exemplary for other development projects in Malaysia. Much to the regret of advocates of preserving nature elements to be blended into and complement development projects, this example was never repeated or followed by later developments.

The Kenny Hills, now renamed Bukit Tunku Hills) was able to preserve much of its pristine forests, natural reserve, and natural features was probably more by chance and force of circumstances than through intent or pre-planning. As a young nation recently obtained self-rule, the economy and technology of that period was unable to sustain the use of

expensive and heavy earth moving equipments. This would have been one of the probably rationale, and constraint which determined the manner that roads were designed to hug the contours and building plots laid out to take advantage of the natural surface run-offs. Existing ravines and watercourse were not altered. Minimal clearing of the natural flora was carried out. Plats were sold off with nature on it. Only when the house owners commenced building that reshaping and removal of trees occurred to facilitate their construction. The bulk of work during the construction of the infrastructure was carried out by human labour with support from light earth moving equipment.

- (8) Dr.C.C. Too was one of the original residents who bought a property at Kenny Hills. Both he and his wife Lum Swee Lan had at that time only recently returned from their studies in Hong Kong. They are both still living in Kenny Hills now renamed Tunku Hills.

The philosophy of not going against nature but to build into nature to harmonize with that provided by nature was way ahead of its time. The impact on the environment being minimal subscribe to current trend of “back to nature” and emphasis on the preservation of nature. The depletion of earth’s precious resources e.g. Oxygen and the thinning of the ozone layer has questioned whether prevailing trend in the manner developments are being carried out. It is for this very reason that Bukit Tunku is an important example a lesson for a new direction to be forged for future Malaysian developments.

### 3.3 b) TRANSITIONAL PERIOD- 1960-1973 (Socfin estate, Damansara Heights development)

Following the success of the Bukit Tunku (Kenny Hills) development another large tract of agriculture land further west was earmarked for housing development. The Socfin estate, predominantly rubber and palm oil was fragmented and curved up for housing development. In comparison to Bukit Tunku, Damansara Heights had more relatively flat land. The terrain for palm oil estates is generally rolling with gentle grades. Rubber in contrast can be planted on the steepest of slopes.

By early 1960’s development and economic growth in Malaysia was gaining impetus, unlike Bukit Tunku planed and developed in the early 50’s, Damansara had the use of more ‘early-model’ heavy earth moving equipment during construction. The consequential result was that more of the natural features were removed.

The hills were cut and valleys filled in, slopes stepped and platformed to receive the buildings. All trees shrubs and topsoil removed or mixed in with the earth for back fillings. Pockets of natural terrain were still maintained and preserved due to access difficulty and inappropriateness use of equipment do the job.

As these earth moving equipment were fairly basic the hills although terrace and platformed still borne some resemblance to their original silhouette. However all the trees from the housing plots were removed. The plots were smaller at 7,000 – 15,000 sq. foot when compared to those of Bukit Tunku. The density was higher. There were more roads and retaining walls became an element in the suburban street scape. The lack of trees and natural floral is the predominant and conspicuous feature of Damansara Heights. The imposition of the heavy machinery on the natural environment has led to its total elimination. Unlike Bukit Tunku this development was to become the model for other housing schemes in Malaysia.

This development not only did it subdivided the estate into plots but it also constructed individual bungalows based on standard designs to be sold. The Xanadu model in 1970 with a land area of approximately 7,000 – 8,000 square feet was sold for approximately

RM47, 000 each. Current prices of properties in this residential suburb are being offered in the market at between RM1.3 – 1.8 million per property. With time Damansara has matured and now restored some of its former greeneries. With time we can look towards the replanting and re-growth of lush tropical landscaping.

### 3.3 c) BOOM PERIOD 1976 –1984 (Bangsar Hills neighbourhood)

As the development of Damansara was coming towards its final stages a major development adjacent to it was planned. It was the Bangsar estate. The total development was 150 acres. Its situation was approximately two miles to the south west of Kuala Lumpur town towards the Pantai valley, was separated from Damansara to its north by a rocky ridge traversing in an east-westerly direction; and is bound at its southern boundaries by the Klang River.

By now most of the housing schemes contributing towards the growth of modern Kuala Lumpur were by private developers who were former owners of large rubber holdings. Many large tracts of land near the town area were owned by Chinese traders who had acquired their properties from the local Malays. These Chinese entrepreneurs were the pioneer developers following in the footsteps of the British.

Mr. Ng Eng Lian, the developer of the Bangsar Hills was one such gentleman. Before embarking on this scheme he had earlier on tried at a modest-sized development at a hillside suburb called Taman Seputeh, along the southern bank of the Klang River and off Jalan Syed Putra (formerly known as Lornie Road). This little development consisting predominantly of linked double-storied terrace-houses sprawl itself in a most delightful manner with the landscape proved to be most successful and most popular with the younger professionals group during the 1970s. The initial selling price for each of these double storey linked-houses in early 1971, with a land area measuring approximately 22 feet by 80 feet, was RM28, 000, by 1973 it had risen to RM32, 000 and its current market price is between RM200, 00 –250,000. This suburb currently has the largest residential concentration of architects per square mile in Malaysia.

The Bangsar development on the other hand was much larger in scale. Not only was housing planned there were other types of development proposed. Its ultimate intent was to create a township to serve the needs of the surrounding dormitory suburbs, e.g. Pantai Hills, Damansara Brickfields and parts of Petaling Jaya. At the time of writing Mr. Ng's vision has come true.

Bangsar's development being carried out during the 70s – 80s saw the application of the most sophisticated of earth-moving equipment. The extensive earthwork for this project was carried out in the shortest of time. During its construction and after the initial phases were completed, the major link road between Bangsar and Kuala Lumpur, Jalan Travers and Jalan Maarof were always flooded after an afternoon's torrential rain. It would bring the peak hour traffic out of Kuala Lumpur to a standstill; a problem to be solved only recently with the implementation of the overall improvement scheme to the waterways around Kuala Lumpur.

All the natural features of the site were removed. All vegetation, outcrops and natural water run-offs were leveled. Bangsar today bear testimony to man's ingenuity and success in taming nature. This is to be the success story, to be retold many times over in the history of the development and growth of Kuala Lumpur. Developers now approach every site as a challenge; all that nature has provided must be taken off; all natural features to be

eliminated; valleys filled in and hills leveled, and on to the bare red earth devoid of any topsoil cover, the roads, drains, houses, playgrounds, etc. are built. Before the house buyers take possession of their keys, some token landscaping would be provided as a mandatory requirement, to be fulfilled for the application of the Certificate of Occupancy. It is to the Local Government's credit that a statute requirement of such was introduced to instill in the developers a sense of responsibility towards creating an environment which is friendly and conducive for pleasant living.

### 3.3 d) CONDOMINIUM PERIOD 1989-1992

Following the Boom of the late 70s until the mid 80s the Malaysian economy took a dip and went into recession. Many housing projects were left uncompleted or abandoned by the developers, many of whom absconding with the purchasers' monies. The surrounding landscape was tainted with the remnants of broken dreams of house owners who have lost their lives' savings. The Government had to intervene, together with financial institutions to salvage and resuscitate some of their deposits. Many culprits were brought to book whilst many made off with their ill-gotten gains to foreign countries that do not have any extradition treaties with Malaysia.

It was with this behind their minds that most Malaysian developers entered the next phase of the development in Kuala Lumpur. Many having barely survived the recent recession were glad to be given another opportunity. There were many new players often with foreign funding from Hong Kong, Taiwan or even Singapore; help fueled the next up-take in the building industry. They concentrated in the building of high-rise or up-market condominiums; this being an area of development which they were familiar with in their homeland. Its sudden take-off took everyone by surprise. No one ever thought it possible considering that memories of the recent debacle of the building industry, were still fresh and evidences everywhere bear silent testimony to the fact.

Selected locations in prime residential suburbs of Kuala Lumpur were targeted for the development of these condominiums. Most popular were the Bangsar Hills, Damansara, Sri Hartamas, Taman Desa, Kampong Kerinchi, Jalan Ampang Hilir/Jalan Ritchie and Jalan U-Thant enclaves. Even the foothills of lush Bukit Tunku were not spared. "They say that mushrooms grow very fast, but in the tropics, especially in Malaysia, "Condominiums grow even faster. Now "condo developments" no longer belong exclusively within the grasp and dominance of some developers. It is common property. The purist concept of what condominium developments should consist of has been "watered – down" to a level that is nothing more than a glorified larger-scaled low cost-type apartments with "frills and thrills". This cycle has brought with it developments of all shapes and sizes. All under the name of "Condominium"."

: Kuala Lumpur has probably the most number of high-rise condominium developments in Malaysia. We are told that 'densities' have gone through the roof and that the old mandatory "60 persons maximum per acre for a minimum of 2 acres development for condominium" is now an 'appendix' to the New Testament, and is no longer applicable. Currently "200 units/acre" is closer to the norm. And why not, if the city can sustain and support such densities? ; if quality of life of residents and users of the city can be maintained? Ultimately the test is whether the smooth functioning and activities of the city can be maintained." (9)

Many of the ills associated with condominium living were not understood by local developers or the city fathers and the approving authorities. There was no effort made to monitor, study, to evaluate and to formulate new guidelines; on what the resultant impact of high density, high-cost and high-rise development will have on the environment and quality of life. Studies ought to have been made to ascertain the best possible answer to new problems created by these mega huge developments.

It would appear that whether existing services and facilities in that location were adequate to handle the extra loading and imposition were not considered in depth. Other problems previously experienced in Kuala Lumpur like, were the drains adequately sized to take the additional overflows and discharge? whether there was sufficient water and water pressure to services these elevated sites?; were the road Networks adequate to handle the increased traffic volume generated? were not carefully scrutinized at the planning application stage for these condominium projects. Planning guidelines and Development Policies of the Local Authority was inadequate and ill-equipped to handle such developments. The culminated effects of these developments are now affecting the surrounding residential neighbourhoods. The Jalan Ampang arterial road, the Federal highway, the Sungai Besi feeder, the inner and outer ring roads have become the bane of commuters working in Kuala Lumpur. Traffic is bumper to bumper at most times, with massive back-ups a common occurrence daily.

Kuala Lumpur the leading metropolis of Malaysia ought to have set an example by planning and encouraging the development of concentrated enclave of high density residential dwellings or condominiums within one suburb; with a concentrated commercial development nearby as a complementary unit, would present Malaysian planners, architects, researchers, and those associated with the design and planning of the environment, a tremendous model for study; on the advantages and pressures not previously considered or understood. With the scattered, sporadic haphazard and uncoordinated developments, which are the current norm, a “laboratory-like” experimentation opportunity is missed.

#### 3.4 KUALA LUMPUR – CITY CENTRE (C.B.D.) DEVELOPMENT

In discussing the growth of the outer Kuala Lumpur focus must also be given to the city area. Especially so the CBD. Its growth and development can be discussed using similar classified periods so defined earlier when discussing development growth;

- a) Transitional and the Boom Periods, 1966 – 1984;
- b) Post-Boom period, 1984 onwards.

#### 3.4 a) TRANSITIONAL AND BOOM PERIODS.

This period DBKL was under the Mayor Tan Sri Yaacob Latiff 1972-83), was very crucial in the development of the capital. He had assumed the post barely two years following the aftermath of the civil unrest in Kuala Lumpur in 1969; this as described earlier was a major intervention in the development of Kuala Lumpur. Post 1969; saw many new agencies working on behalf of the government in implementing the NEP, (new economic policy). In restructuring society in order to distribute wealth equitably the ownership of many new developments in the CBD had new equity participation by the bumiputras; who had until then being mainly landowners in the rural areas. This was carried out under the charge of UDA (Urban Development Authority) refer to Section 2.1, for a complete description of its role.

The thinking of the planners during this period was to encourage the entrenched former residents to leave the traditional enclaves within the city. Most of these were Chinese who had settled in the town ever since the settlement of Kuala Lumpur was founded in 1857, and living above shophouses. With re-zoning these former mixed residential/commercial properties in the CBD were not permitted to re-develop with residential use. The resulting effect was that all new developments in Kuala Lumpur had no residential provisions. In effect this led to the rapid de-urbanisation of the city and indirectly contributed towards the growth of the major peripheral housing projects as described earlier on in the chapter. Former city-dwellers had to now seek new alternative housing in the suburbs.

These new housing schemes tried to replace that which was lost when they moved. Schools, town centres, markets, community halls and other trappings commonly found in the Malaysian towns had to be provided. But it could not replace the texture, tradition, fabric and mosaic of urban living. The proximity to all the conveniences which they were familiar with were no longer available. Many of the older folks found adjustment to the new life-style difficult, but for the young it was a pleasant change. The demand for alternative housing outside of Kuala Lumpur meant more housing was required; and more of the former rubber estates or large compounded-villas had to be converted for housing purpose. This period saw Kuala Lumpur losing most of its heritage buildings. The need to replace the traditional with what was thought to be new; or the need to obliterate traces of colonial history, caused many fine old buildings to be torn down, all in the name of progress. Many streets lost their landmarks. Jalan Leboh Ampang and Medan Pasar lost two fine buildings, the old Hongkong Bank building and the old Citibank building. Bukit Mahkamah lost the former court-house complex to make way for the new Malayan Bank building. Streets of shophouses built with finely sculptured façade were torn down to make way for faceless 'modern-style' shopping complexes with the least architectural merits. Under UDA's policies no individual lot in the CBD was allowed to be developed unless amalgamated with other adjoining properties. These massive developments were to have a profound impact on the traffic, pedestrian and urban-scape of Kuala Lumpur. Many street façade along Jalan Ipoh, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Batu Road), Jalan Bandar (High St.), Jalan Cheng Lok (Foch Avenue), Jalan Tun Perak (Mountbatten Road), were randomly destroyed by infil developments; thereby disrupting the strong and continuous rhythm and sense of unity of the street. The street façade of these row shophouses were often classical in spirit, formalized by a centrally placed pediment with two symmetrically designed ends to finish off the elevational treatment of the street block.

Kuala Lumpur was going through an exciting time. All and sundry were getting into the act of being a developer. Previously humble shopkeepers who owned properties in Kuala Lumpur suddenly found that their family home or shophouse was worth a goldmine opted to cash in their new found wealth. Together with this joy was the apprehension of having to set aside 30% of their equity for 'new partners' as provided for under the NEP. This was initially unfamiliar for the traditional Chinese families who had always worked from within the family unit. As time went on this formula was understood and accepted by all investors and developers. The city centre in the meantime with most of the inhabitants moved out lost its original character. Kuala Lumpur lost its Asian-ness. It was a dead city at night, devoid of life and other activities which existed before. It stayed that way for many years. A list of significant buildings built during this period is attached in appendix 1.

### 3.4 b) POST BOOM PERIOD

Tan Sri Yaacob Latiff was replaced by Tan Sri Elyas Omar as the new mayor of Kuala Lumpur in 1983, growth of the CBD was still at a rapid pace. After 1984 the economy of

Malaysia started slowing down. The CBD was devoid of any construction activity. The only activity was on projects which were in the midst of construction. The lack of economic wealth accentuated the dreariness and lifelessness of the inner city area.

Towards the end of the recession, the DBKL embarked on a programme of arresting the decay and to revitalize life in the city, and to stimulate growth. No longer were there compulsory acquisitions of equity into developments by UDA. It had by then suffered some unwise investments. Saddled with the burden of having sustained these bad investments proved to be difficult. Individual development were permitted without having to amalgamate with adjoining properties, or referred to UDA, a reversal of the policies set when Tan Sri Yaacob Latiff was the Mayor.

Mixed-developments in downtown areas were encouraged. Liberal approvals were given introducing more residential –type developments. This deliberate policy resuscitated the inner city centre of K.L. DBKL provided locations for hawkers and petty traders to ply their trades. Some streets were closed off and pedestrianised at selected days and time, for trading which allowed the enjoyment of a city otherwise dominated by the cars. On Saturdays the site of the former low-cost apartment, at Jalan Suleiman off Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman was set aside for a day-long open-market where agricultural produce are sold. It was a way of introducing the countryside to the inhabitants in the city. The carnival atmosphere and spirit softened and warmed the impersonal lifestyle of the modern city.

A new crop of apartment type buildings began to appear in the city. Jalan Hicks and Ceylon hill enclave previously earmarked for commercial use has become a new residential district surrounded by commercial developments. High-rise apartments were popular with the expatriate community working in Kuala Lumpur. Gone were the days of expatriates occupying huge and luxurious villas with well-manicured gardens. The varied needs of the expatriate community encouraged variety in the designs of high-rise apartments.

The destruction and demolition of heritage buildings of inner Kuala Lumpur went on unabated until 1984. There were concerns and objections from numerous citizen groups over the continued eradication of the old city centre. It led to the formation of a conservation movement to preserve and save the vanishing heritage, known as Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia trust). Through careful planning being seen to be a responsible organisation; by being non-confrontational; and through the continuous efforts of its members the Trust was able to earn the confidence of the Government and therefore made tremendous headway towards achieving its cause. The Badan (as it is popularly known in Malaysia) will be discussed in greater detail later.

### 3.5 KAMPONG BARU – A village within a city

As a modern city Kuala Lumpur is unique. No other cities can boast of having two rivers co-joining at its centre; a hill nature reserve, covered with primary jungle; and not far away a traditional Malay village which appeared to have stood still as the rest of the city went by.

Known as Kampong Baru (new village) it is a Malay reserve. No land transfer out of the hands of a Malay is permitted. Development within this enclave need not be referred to DBKL, although it is within the Federal boundaries, but it is referred to a Council of Elders, of the settlement. This restriction meant to protect the rights of the Malay ownership of their land holding, prevented and discouraged any redevelopment or investment opportunities. Unlike their Chinese counterparts in other parts of KL, who discovered that

they were sitting on goldmines during the 'boom', the Malay found no takers for their land thereby missed out.

All the elements of a traditional village are still found here. Houses are in timber some grouped around open spaces, others lined along narrow streets without destroying the feel of the country and rural ambience, and in the middle is a village centre where shops and the traditional wet market is located. Fowls and ducks run around the compounds taking refuge under shady fruit trees complete the scenario of an enviable salubrious oasis in the heart of a city. The government realizing this anomaly in development opportunity among the Malay landowners proposed a redevelopment program for Kampong Baru in 1991. It was to permit and to encourage more commercially viable and better financial yielding projects to bring the settlement into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The need for improvement is essential, however there are always other options, which may present a more creative and innovative solution yet catering for everyone's aspirations. To loss a unique and rare; culturally rich and traditional reserve in this typological situation would be regrettable. Other options at stimulating revenue and additional income for its inhabitants without having to destroy this reserve must be considered and can be found. Its protection and conservation with an adaptive reuse program can generate income otherwise thought to be impossible. To date there has been in indication of what is happening to Kampong Baru.

#### 4.0 CONSERVATION MOVEMENTS

The destruction of major parts of Kuala Lumpur's heritage in the late 1970s and early 1980s prompted many of the concerned citizens to group together for a common cause. Losing the common battle to save Court Hill brought together all the splintered groups. Under the coordination and guidance of a former British public servant, now a well-respected establishment, Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard mooted and formed the first conservation movement in Malaysia named the Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust). Its formation in 1982 paved the way for others in different parts of Malaysia to follow, e.g. Penang, Melaka, Sarawak, Perak etc. It was founded to promote the permanent preservation of Malaysia Architectural Heritage for the benefits and education of the people of Malaysia.

##### 4.1 a) BADAN WARISAN MALAYSIA

The Badan was founded in 1982 but incorporated on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1983, in pursuance of the provisions of Section 24 of the Companies Act 1965. The original subscribers of the Company were:

Dato Harun M. Hashim	Judge	
Jimmy Lim Cheok Siang	Architect	
Chen Voon Fee	Architect	
Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard	Writer	(10)

The reason for incorporating the Badan as a Company was to provide the necessary mechanism for it to acquire and dispose of heritage properties. At the time of its incorporation there were numerous buildings under threat namely the Peninsula Hotel (formerly Loke Hall), the Majestic Hotel, and the Central market. As the Badan was to be non-confrontational and to maintain an image of respectability and decorous company dedicated towards conservation, it could not be seen to openly and vocally campaign

against the destruction of these buildings. Therefore another group consisting of younger members formed a society called, Persatuan Sahabat-Sahabat Warisan Malaysia, with the object of complementing the activities of the Badan.

#### 4.1 b) PERSATUAN SAHABAT-SAHABAT MALAYSIA

The Sahabat as it was popularly known is officially “Friends of the Heritage of Malaysia Society”, and registered with the Registrar of Societies and having as its registered address no. 21, Jalan Kia Peng, Kuala Lumpur, was formed in January 1984. The original office bearers were:

Zehan Albakri	President
Yang Chong	Vice President
Rosedina Shamsuddin	
Lam Seng Fatt	Hon. Secretary
Faridah Abdul Kahar	Hon. Treasurer

And supported by an enthusiastic Council and group of young members their first campaign was to save the Majestic Hotel. A series of functions for fund raising were organized. A film premiere, a save the Majestic Ball, and numerous media exposure to win public support were organized. The campaign was a success; the Majestic was not demolished about converted to be an art gallery, which inspired the fire of enthusiasm of the young member to further the cause for conservation.

(10) Memorandum and Articles of Badan (Incorporated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of August 1983)

#### 4.2 a) THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF BADAN

The Aims and Objectives of the Badan were:

- a) to promote the permanent preservation for the benefit and education of the people of Malaysia of all buildings which because of their historical associations of architectural features or for other reasons are considered by the Council of the Badan to form part of the Heritage of Malaysia;
- b) to buy, take or otherwise acquire buildings or land or any estate or interest therein;
- c) to repair, renovate, restore, rebuild and generally to maintain and develop any designated buildings or land;
- d) with the provision of suitable safeguards to sell, let on lease or tendency, exchange, mortgage or otherwise dispose of buildings or land or any estate or interest therein;
- e) to provide furnish and fit out with all necessary furniture, equipment and other fittings and to maintain, manage such buildings and other premises as may from time to time be required for the purposes of carrying out the objects of the Badan;
- f) to make such arrangements to enable the public to view and enjoy any buildings;

- g) to obtain publicity and to advertise in order to make its objects and activities known;
- h) by publishing books or pamphlets or in any other appropriate manner to make known to the public the existence of buildings of particular beauty or historical, architectural or constructional interest;

#### 4.2 b) THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SAHABAT

The objectives for which the Persatuan Sahabat-Sahabat Warisan Malaysia was established for were;

- a) to encourage, support and assist the Heritage of Malaysia Trust;
- b) to increase public interest in the Heritage of Malaysia;
- c) to encourage and to provide facilities for organized visits of young people to old buildings which have been designated as part of the Heritage of Malaysia;
- d) to receive donations and subscriptions from persons desiring to support this Society;
- e) to assist the Council of the Heritage of Malaysia Trust in raising funds in any manner allowed by law, including the following:
  - i) by the printing, publishing and circulating of pamphlets, leaflets or pictures;
  - ii) by the sale of badges and membership badges;
- f) to assemble information about building which may form part of the Heritage Trust Malaysia and to transmit this information to the Council of the Trust;
- g) The number of members of the Society shall be unlimited;
- h) The type of members of the Society shall be;
  - i) Life Members,
  - ii) Ordinary Members,
  - iii) Corporate Members,
  - iv) Junior Members (under the age of eighteen years);
- i) No University/University College student shall be accepted as a member of the Society without prior approval of the Vice-Chancellor concerned.

#### 4.3 IMPACT OF THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

The main area of concern confronting the newly formed Movements was to direct its main thrust at the Government and it covered the following areas.

- a) that Malaysia has the good fortune to possess a wealth of architectural treasures reflecting its rich cultural history. Many of these buildings are Government owned and maintained;

- b) it is important that these heritage assets should be properly maintained in order that Malaysians may be proud of their nation's culture and history;
- c) that in this context, attempts at preservation, conservation and restoration of such buildings which are being carried out; should have their strategy and implementation properly guided and directed, to produce results where the historic authenticity; is not lost;
- d) that in view of the Government's efforts and willingness to put funds into this important area, that these large sums of money are not misspent;
- e) that Conservation need not be expensive; but what is far more important is careful and sensitive planning; and
- f) that Badan Warisan Malaysia's approach towards conservation practised is following worldwide guidelines, and is governed by the following dictum;

Sensitivity,  
Simplicity,  
Sincerity.

(11) Constitution of Persatuan Sahabat-Sahabat Warisan Malaysia, (27 February 1991)

#### 4.4 HERITAGE BUILDINGS SAVED

Badan embarked on numerous projects without seeking Government funding or aid. Fundamentally very few organizations or Government bodies would provide aid for least of all conservation purpose. Funding for Badan's projects were all raised by its members. Among some of the projects saved in the early days of formation were:

- a) The former Peninsula Hotel, now occupied by the Malaysia Institute of Architects (as their secretariat, with Badan as a tenant), and having being restored almost to its former glory without losing its essential character;
- b) The Hotel Majestic was restored, repaired, converted and is now used as the National Art Gallery;
- c) Central Market formerly the wet produce market of Kuala Lumpur designated for demolition to make way for a 5-star hotel; is now restored and refurbished and converted into Kuala Lumpur's cultural market. This centre is almost seven (7) years and is being enjoyed by both locals and tourists. It is now inconceivably that Kuala Lumpur can exist without Central Market;
- d) Gedung Raja Abdullah, the storehouse and residence of the first Malay tin-mining pioneer, in Klang, occupied by the police since 1903, was on the verge of demolition to make way for two badminton courts was saved and converted as Malaysia's first tin-mining museum. It is now a landmark in Klang;
- e) Istana Tengku Long, Kampong Faja, Besut, Trengganu, a long abandoned Malay palace built entirely of timber was a major Badan's self-financed project with funding raised from Malaysia's own petroleum company, Petronas. The entire building was dismantled and re-erected on the compound of the Trengganu State Museum. After this project Badan's success and credibility was entrenched in the minds of the public and the Government.

There were other programmes aimed at education and winning the public and government, seminars were organized regularly, public lectures on Conservation, published documents and handbooks about Malaysian heritage, inviting foreign experts to exchange experiences and learn from them, public fund raising activities, etc. Kuala Lumpur during the tenure of Tan Sri Elyas Omar became a very Heritage conscious city.

Elyas played a difficult role balancing between the opposing pressures. That a large portion of Kuala Lumpur still has many Heritage buildings may be attributed to his efforts. DBKL has produced a handbook on guidelines to how conservation may be done and on what may be permitted to be developed in conservation areas. The city heritage buildings were classified and zoned according to its importance in the context of conservation and preservation.

The Ministry of Local Government and Housing is currently working with the Badan to produce legislation for the protection of Malaysia's heritage. Until the formation of Badan Malaysia's heritage and monuments were under the purview of the Museum as provided for in under the Antiquities Act (12). The provisions of the Act are inadequate to protect the ancient and heritage structures for prosperity. It is hoped that the new legislation will be more wholesome for Conservation.

(12) Antiquities Act, 1976

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Like all emerging Nations, Malaysia went through a transitional period of soul searching. Getting to grips with its new identity and stepping into the world, unsure of itself, seeking recognition, winning friends and trying to find its own feet. A study of Kuala Lumpur's development and growth provides an instant-telescoped review of what the Nation went through. The description of the different chronological development periods of Kuala Lumpur commensurated to Malaysia's economic growth and growing confidence. Pessimists had predicted the disintegration of the multi-racial society, especially so immediately after the civil unrest of May 1969.

Like the Civil war of 1866 where Kuala Lumpur was completely destroyed and then rebuilt, 1969 heralded a new birth and growth with impetus for the nation in general but Kuala Lumpur in particular. The unrest may in hindsight now appear to be a symbolic 'cleansing' of that which had anything to do with the legacy left behind by the Colonials. The resulting rivalry between the Chinese and the Malays in 1969, may be seen as the final chapter of the British policy of 'divide and rule' or a fore-runner of the 'apartheid policy' for South Africa.

Prior to Independence neither the Chinese nor the Malays were ever consider as an integral racial grouping. The Chinese were classified under the dialect groups of either, e.g. Cantonese, Hockkiens, Hainanese, Hakkas etc.; whilst the Malays were classified under regional groupings, e.g. Bugis, Javanese, Kelantanese, Pantanis etc. With such a distinctive division a complete integration and co-operation between the ethnic groups was never quite possible. The Independence forged all these different ethnic groups to think and work towards a single Nation, and a single National Identity.

Having been divergent ethnic entities all these while the two main racial groups had difficulty thinking and acting collectively, within themselves as one unit; and even less so as a single Nation. The racial commotion of 1969 shocked everyone in the country. It brought a sense of realization, realism and resolution that there was to be no repeat of what happened. The Identity crisis of the Malays and the Chinese were real and some urgent solutions had to be found to allay their fears and apprehensions towards each other. The Malays' fears were epitomized and expressed in the book 'The Malay Dilemma', written by Malaysia's current Prime Minister, Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, when he was a relatively junior member of the United Malay National Organisation

(UMNO). It was banned for a while for fear of fanning racial sentiments. That this publication is to-day freely available only serve to reflect a maturity of the population towards tolerance, understanding, sensitivity and mutual respect for each others' rights, and it explains why today Malaysia's plural society is viewed with envy by many of the former industrialized nations. It was towards this end that the various NEP's were introduced, as a formula towards correcting the then imbalance in the distribution of wealth. The experiment is now a proven success.

Kuala Lumpur is today a bustling city of modern high-rise buildings, tree lined streets, green is the predominant colour, new condominiums, streets full of cars and there are more buildings coming up. The new city image and increase in wealth has not affected the inhabitants, and the people, by and large, have not changed or lost the friendliness and warmth, therefore some of the descriptive ills befitting other modern cities do not apply to Kuala Lumpur. It is still a city safe enough to walk in at night. Law and order is the pride of Malaysia; muggings so common-place in other cities is not the norm in Kuala Lumpur. Cleanliness is foremost in the mind of the local authorities. But unlike some other Asian cities where they have lost their identity, Kuala Lumpur is still very much intact, due to the efforts of citizens' movements and caring authorities. Notwithstanding the transformation it went through in the 70s and 80s Kuala Lumpur is still a very livable and an environmentally friendly city. We are hopeful that with time it would become even more comfortable and easy to live in city.

This short essay is by no means exhaustive to exemplify the cultural and urban changes that Kuala Lumpur underwent since Independence. There could have been a different approach taken in discussing this topic, hopefully the one adopted by the writer may be accepted as a reasonable coming from some one actually living and experiencing it firsthand.