

A shabby stretch in city gets a new image

STAR
5/6/06
(Monday)

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JALAN Bukit Belachan, once a shabby stretch with illegal wooden workshops, stalls and squatter homes, is to be spruced up into a modern city locale. The plans begin with the Ampang Waterfront project.

The multi-million ringgit development faces Jalan Bukit Belachan, but gets its name from the meandering river that flows behind it.

From the river are views of Taman Kosas, Bukit Indah, Ampang Jaya and the Gombak Forest reserve.

Jalan Bukit Belachan is about a five-minute drive to the Kuala Lumpur-Ampang border.

For about 20 years, the stretch, reminiscent of a backward rural area, did no justice to its close proximity to Kuala Lumpur.

"The area had become an eyesore," said Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) president Datuk Ahmad Shafii. The area is a Drainage and Irrigation Department (JPS) reserve.

He said there were public complaints on the number of workshops that had sprouted in the area. "There was also complain of river pollution," he added.

In the 1960s, Jalan Bukit Belachan was a small

dirt road that made its way through dense jungle. There were no housing estates then, just small villages at certain pockets with Pekan Ampang as the main town.

Today, Bandar Baru Ampang, Taman Kosas, Taman Sri Ampang, Taman Watan and Taman Dagang Jaya are some of the housing estates that border Jalan Bukit Belachan.

"In the early years, Chinese peasants farmed on the banks of the river," said long-time Ampang resident Balagurunathan Sambasivam.

The Sri Maha Nageswary Amman Alayam Temple traces its history back to 1960, and in 1985 the Gurdwara Sahib Lembah Jaya was born out of a squatter home.

In 2004, about 127 illegal workshops and squatter houses were demolished to make way for the waterfront project.

The squatters were relocated and given options to buy low-cost homes at the Permai Shukor



Tan ... 'it is an uphill task'



Jogging tracks have been laid out beside Sungai Ampang.

development project in Lembah Jaya while the workshops were relocated to Taman Industri Lembah Jaya.

The two places of worship were spared eviction. "These will be incorporated as part of the waterfront's appeal," said Ahmad Shafii.

The entire project, said GMH Properties Sdn Bhd managing director Tan Ah Chai, comprised of Parcels A, B and C. "These measures 6.8ha and are along a 1.6km stretch on land alienated to MPAJ for 99 years," he said. GMH Properties is working on the waterfront project through a joint-venture agreement with the council.

"MPAJ was adamant to clean up the municipality and rid it of its down-trodden image," said Ahmad Shafii. "The plan was to turn it into a recreational area, but has since changed to make it a mixed development site with showrooms, shop lots and restaurants."

Tan said the area would also have a jogging track, fountain at a courtyard, playground, places of worship, library and fitness stations.

There will be bridges built to connect Ampang Waterfront to Taman Kosas with three in Parcel A alone.

"These will make it easier for residents to patronise the area," said Tan, adding that parking would not be a problem. "There should be about a thousand bays for cars."

Parcel A has been completed and is expected to open next month.

It is a welcome change from its previous image. The structures and row of buildings and plants are now defined neatly.

"It is an uphill task," said Tan. Banks were reluctant to fund the project, so GMH Properties forked out its own money to realise the project. "We took up the challenge because we are confident," added Tan.

Parcel B, is to begin soon, followed by Parcel C. Both are to be ready in 2008.

Their prayers have been answered

THE Sri Maha Nageswary Amman Alayam began as a small shrine in 1960.

Located along Jalan Bukit Belachan, the temple stands by the banks of Sungai Ampang.

M. Kumara Devan said the area was thick with shrubs and its undergrowth was infested with snakes. "My father, the late Munian Munusamy, offered prayers to appease the snakes," he said.

As time went by, the Indian community joined in the prayers and the area became known as a holy ground," said Kumara.

"And, the snakes became guardians to the people and a simple wooden shrine was built," he said.

The wooden structure gave way to a brick building. During annual festivals, the temple receives about 5,000 devotees.

Ampang Jaya Municipal councillor Balagurunathan Sambasivam said the temple had powers to fulfil prayers and vows.

Kumara, the current temple chairman said MPAJ's decision to allow the temple to remain at Parcel B was "godsend".

"We have been told that the temple grounds would be gazetted and MPAJ has asked us to beautify the temple," he said.

"The new look will include a dome and statues incorporated into the temple's facade," said Balagurunathan.

In 1985, the Gurdwara Sahib Lembah Jaya came to be along the same road. "It will also be upgraded," said its chairman Gurdev Singh of the temple that began out of a squatter house.

It was the place where Sikh devotees offered prayers.



Parcel B of the Ampang Waterfront project involves this stretch where the two temples are located.

"Our grandparents lived in Ampang as cattle owners," said Gurdev Singh.

The temple caught fire about two years ago. "With help of the Sikh community from all over the country, we rebuilt it," said Gurdev Singh.

Now, it is an air-conditioned structure with a carpeted prayer hall, dining hall and kitchen.

Both the Hindu and Sikh temples are located

on reserve land.

"The temples play an active role in programmes for the youth in the area," said Balagurunathan.

"When MPAJ proposed to upgrade the area, the Indian and Sikh communities requested for the temples to be spared," he said.

Their prayers were answered.



Kumara ... 'And, the snakes became our guardians'



Balagurunathan ... 'the temple has powers'



Gurdev Singh ... 'our grandparents lived as cattle owners'