

COVER STORY

In the market for preservation

Despite its hustle and bustle, the 47-year-old Pasar Kedai Payang is in danger of being demolished to make way for a mega-modern development said to be worth RM400 million. But there are crusaders fighting to save the old market. DAZMAN MANAN speaks to one, renowned architect and Kuala Terengganu MP, Raja Datuk Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad.



PASAR PAYANG OFFERS A VARIETY OF GOOD BUYS UNIQUE TO TERENGGANU

apartments are set to be built on the present site of the iconic, national heritage. Apparently, this involves a cool RM400 million investment.

“At the moment (at press time), the state government is going ahead with the so-called redevelopment,” says renowned architect and Kuala Terengganu MP, Raja Datuk Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad, who is on a crusade to save the market.

Terengganu state government officials including Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Said could not be reached for comment.

However, in an earlier report the MB did say it was necessary to redevelop Pasar Payang since it was declared unsafe by the Works Department and that it was dirty, tarnishing the state capital’s status as a Waterfront Heritage City.

“There are only three unstable columns that can easily be fixed. Just because of these three rickety columns, the entire pasar has to be torn down? Venice is sinking and UNESCO is doing all they can to save it. Why are we not doing the same with Pasar Payang?” asks Raja Kamarul, or better known as Raja Bahrin.

Modest and unpretentious, the present physical structure of Pasar Payang may be only about half a century old but the market environment has been there for over a 100 years.

“Back then, traders were selling from shacks and huts by the river. The main attraction of Pasar Payang is the traditional aspect of it, not so much the architectural heritage.

LOCATED by Sungai (river) Terengganu, it is easy to understand why Pasar Kedai Payang in Kuala Terengganu is ranked third most popular market in Asia (the first is Bangkok’s floating market) in a survey done a few years ago published in an airline’s in-flight magazine.

It has a laidback, age-old appeal to it where you can get *rambutans*, *jambu air* (rose apples) and mangosteens from boys helping out their parents after school, or beef, chicken and fish floss from sarong-clad elderly women who probably had these traditional savouries made in their own kitchen.

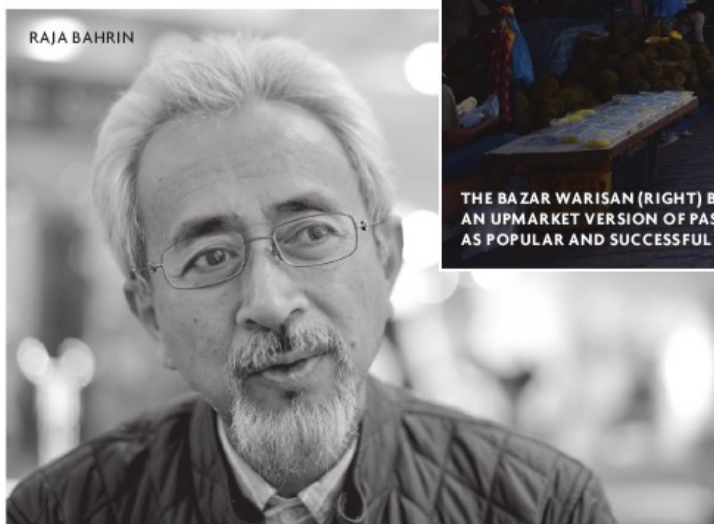
Home to over 200 stalls, Pasar Payang, as it is fondly known, is also the place to find *batik* and *songket* ready-to-wear and fabrics, two specific must-buys when visiting the east coast state.

Why, there are even goldsmiths here, another gleaming east coast commodity, who have been doing brisk business at the market for generations along with more familiar market traders like fish, chicken, meat and vegetable sellers.

Sadly, the 47-year-old marketplace is in danger of being demolished. A mega-modern infrastructure comprising a four-level supermarket (touted as the new and improved Pasar Payang), 23-floor, 550-room five-star hotel and 30 storeys of



THE BAZAR WARISAN (RIGHT) BUILT A FEW YEARS AGO AS AN UPMARKET VERSION OF PASAR PAYANG (LEFT) IS NOT AS POPULAR AND SUCCESSFUL AS THE ICONIC MARKET



RAJA BAHRIN

“It is a way of doing things in the market, the culture, the way trade is done, the products that are sold, the people selling them and so on that makes it one-of-a-kind. It’s an institution in itself. It’s not just another regular market.”

Another unique point is the fact that the traders have a healthy competitive spirit and camaraderie. They are all interdependent.

“When the state government wanted to separate the wet market at one time (they said the fish and meat sellers should move to another location), the dry goods traders resisted and insisted they be together.”

To the locals, Pasar Payang is like their 7-11, notes the 58-year-old Terengganu royal.

“It’s always been a lifesaver, so to speak. Even in the 1960s and 1970s when you needed something you would just go to Pasar Payang. When other places are closed or do not have what you want, Pasar Payang will always be there, ever-ready to serve.”

Pasar Payang, he says, represents the whole spectrum of Terengganu society, whether you’re from the furthest village or the nearest town. “There’s a very interesting mix of culture there. Even tourists cherish the character of the place and the variety of things that can be had in this very complex.

“You can say Pasar Payang is the window to Terengganu – the food, the culture and the people of Terengganu are here in one place.”

The state government may think that bulldozing it down and building a fully air-conditioned, four-storey “Pasar Payang” is a great idea, he adds, but it is likely to be the usual and ubiquitous supermarket.

“It will definitely lose its originality and authenticity. The traders will surely not be able to afford the rent when it is all-modern and fanciful. To some of the *makciks*, even paying RM100 or RM150 of monthly rent is a struggle,” he explains.

Furthermore, Raja Bahrin foresees certain standards will be set for the traders in terms of product packaging and pricing to suit a contemporary supermarket.

“It’s going to be costly for these people and I don’t think they will be able to afford the upgrade.”

He cites the three-level Bazar Warisan (heritage bazaar) opposite Pasar Payang as an example. “The idea was to create an upmarket version of Pasar Payang. It is not as

successful as Pasar Payang by any measure because rental there is high.”

Visitors who come to Terengganu don’t want to look for high-end products, he observes. “They’re keen to purchase things typical to Terengganu and they want to shop and soak in the atmosphere the way that our ancestors did in the old days.”

Certain quarters say his mission to preserve Pasar Payang is a political campaign but Raja Bahrin stresses that he was brought into the issue by the traders themselves. They approached him at the end of last year even before he started being actively involved in politics. They sought his help because they knew that he’s a committed member of Badan Warisan Malaysia (Malaysian Heritage Trust) since its inception in 1983.

“There’s nothing political about Pasar Payang. Everybody loves the market. In fact, I know of UMNO members who feel sad and upset about this but being loyal to the party they dare not say anything outwardly or officially.

“It’s heartbreaking when people say this issue is being exploited by the opposition for political mileage. The election is over. We are fighting for the people. What is there to gain now?” says the PAS MP.

It’s pathetic, he adds. “We are striving to be a developed nation by 2020 and we are totally tearing our past down. You don’t have to develop at the expense of history and heritage.

“Look at Istanbul, Turkey, where there’s the old Istanbul in which everything is intact like the Grand Bazaar, Topkapi Palace and Sultan Ahmed mosque and there’s the new Istanbul co-existing side by side.”

What Pasar Payang needs is some fixing and sprucing up. As it is now, it is not in its original state as it was designed to be.

“Over the years, there have been a lot of modifications done by the authorities who wanted to increase rent, which

has caused a fair bit of stuffiness and lack of ventilation.

“Yes, it is not very comfortable but it is not beyond repair. We can try to restore it to its original state and increase comfort level by having more fans and cross-ventilation.”

Apparently, a proposal for its restoration was approved in 2007 under the previous MB’s administration. “The initial plan was the correct one and part of the funds for the refurbishment came from the Tourism Ministry.”

“So, why did the ministry allocate money for a *pasar*’s renovation? There has to be certain special attributes to it. Because it recognises the tourism benefits of Pasar Payang for the country. Everything was ready until the present MB came in and had other ideas,” explains Raja Bahrin.

As an architect he recognises the need for new buildings but not on the site of an important legacy. “There are hundreds and hundreds of acres of reclaimed land in other parts of Kuala Terengganu which can be used for this. They’ve been idle for the past eight years.

“We are not anti-development at all. By all means, please invest. We are more than happy but not at the cost of history, heritage and people’s way of life.”

He points out that the market is in close proximity to the official palace Istana Maziah, constructed during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin III in 1897 and Masjid Abidin, Terengganu’s old state royal mosque built by Sultan Zainal Abidin II between 1793 and 1808.

“These are the state’s three major monuments. The mosque represents the spiritual aspect, the palace symbolises the ruling elite while the *pasar* signifies the *rakyat*. This is such a unique situation and they want the *pasar* removed? It’s criminal to do it.”

Although Pasar Payang is a Terengganu affair Raja Bahrin feels the nation needs to share this issue and save it from murder in the name of modernity.

“If society allows it to happen then I don’t think we deserve to consider ourselves cultured in any sense.”

Downsides of trading up



FAUZI
ABDUL
RAHMAN

ringgit project consisting of an apartment, hotel and shopping complex.

“How can the state government allow this to happen? Pasar Payang is our livelihood,” says Fauzi, 46, who inherited the *batik* business from his father.

He says he is happy and satisfied with his current sales but Fauzi sees a bleak future for his business if Pasar Payang is turned into the proposed mall or supermarket. “It’s not going to be the same. Tourists don’t want to go

to a shopping complex when they come to KT (Kuala Terengganu). They want to experience Pasar Payang where things are cheap and the ambience is relaxed and easygoing,” he explains.

Another *batik* seller Badrul Abdullah has had his shop in the market for 20 years and he feels there isn’t a need to tear down the popular market. “What ought to be done instead is refurbish it to make it more convenient and comfortable for traders as well as shoppers,” suggests the 47-year-old. He says the local council



BADRUL
ABDULLAH



CHE' MA
YAHYA

could improve on the ventilation and fans as well as employ more cleaners to keep the place fresh and spotless.

Che’ Ma Yahya meanwhile fears that when the market becomes a “swanky shop with an apartment plus a posh hotel”, rent will surely be hiked.

“I can’t afford to pay the rent, I know this. As it is, I’m struggling to make ends meet. I think I will have to *pindah* (move) but I really can’t think of any other place to go where rental is reasonable and tourists are guaranteed.

“This new multi-million ringgit project only benefits the state government. We are the victims of this so-called development,” says the feisty woman who has been trading at the market for 26 years.

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For 21-year-old fruit seller Fahmi Izudin, Pasar Payang is like his second home. “I practically grew up here. I used to help out my parents when I was a boy. I even have uncles and aunts who are doing business here.

“We’d be very sad if the *pasar* is taken away from us. We are told that we will be invited back to the new and upgraded Pasar Payang but I am certain that the rent will not be the same. I’m currently paying less than RM100 a month in rent.”

Khairil Ashraf, 33, shares the same sentiment. “I’m worried I won’t be able to pay the high rent in the new building. I pray and hope the state government will come to their senses and leave Pasar Payang alone. Have the project elsewhere.”

Khairil is the fourth generation in his family to run a stall in Pasar Payang selling snacks like beef, chicken and fish floss, *keropok* (fish crackers) and *sema* (a traditional candy from the east coast states of



FAHMI IZUDIN

Terengganu and Kelantan).

He says local and foreign tourists love to try the edibles unique to Terengganu. “From my observation, they also enjoy the bargaining bit. They find haggling exciting and amusing because it is not common in their respective countries. I believe when Pasar Payang is made more upmarket there surely won’t be any bargaining or haggling allowed.”

Goldsmith Yusof Ali of Kedai Emas dan Permata Setanjak notes that even his regular customers are not happy with the fact that Pasar Payang will be turned into a modern complex. “They’ve been buying from me for



YUSOF ALI

many years and they like coming here because Pasar Payang has that homely feeling where people are friendly and welcoming,” says the 46-year-old whose clients include locals as well as those from Kuala Lumpur, Johor and Singapore.

Another plus point, he adds,

which tourists as well as locals find interesting is that they are able to purchase *keropok*, *keropok lekor* (fish sausage) and banana fritters hot off the frying pan, or sample fruits like mangoes and durians on the spot as they are peeled or cracked open by the vendor.

“I’m not sure if they’re able to get the same experience in a modern shop setting,” says Yusof, adding that the honest, casual charm of Pasar Payang can never be replicated.



KHAIRIL ASHRAF

COVER STORY

Travelling back in town

Sungai Way may sit right smack in the middle of the concrete jungle but it has lost none of its old world charm... a rare thing indeed in a fast-paced city like Petaling Jaya. Dato' Lim Hock San reminisces about the good old days and tells DAZMAN MANAN how proud he is to be a Sungai Way boy.



WHO knew an American president once walked on the modest streets of Sungai Way? Yes, Richard Nixon and his wife Thelma Catherine had paid a visit to Sungai Way New Village

on Nov 26, 1953.

Nixon was then the US vice-president who was interested to find out more about Malaya's New Villages settlements, devised by the British to segregate villages from communist insurgents led by Parti Komunis Malaya (Malayan Communist Party).

No other world-famous names have stopped at Sungai Way New Village after that and the area then became known for bad souls – dead and alive – in the form of gang members and *hantu stokin* (ghost) in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

There are many versions about the latter urban legend, one of which was of an old lady who would go from house to house to sell socks. The creepy part was that she wore a black veil to hide her

face. She had dabbled in black magic but did not adhere to the practices, causing her face to slowly rot like a corpse. To retract the curse she had to drink the blood of a virgin girl.

"No *la*, those are just stories created by people," says Dato' Lim Hock San, almost vehemently.

Lim, who is in his mid-50s, was born and bred in Sungai Way New Village, now known as Kampung Seri Setia. It was renamed about 20 years ago, most likely to avoid being mistaken for Bandar Sunway.

However, it is still referred to as Sungai Way by many because of its unique identity and deeply-rooted character. It's been said that there were signs of settlement in Sungai Way dating as far back as 143 years ago (in 1870). In the 19th century there were only rubber estates and tin mines.

"I was born in my house in Sungai Way on Road 13. My childhood years were a lot of fun. I could walk freely

anywhere, anytime with my friends.

"Safety was not an issue at all. My family and others in the area never encountered any gangsters, let alone ghosts," he says laughingly.

Lim fondly remembers the time he played and caught fish at a river that flowed through the area of which the village was named after. "There was nothing much in Sungai Way apart from wooden houses and rubber trees. It was a nice little *kampung*." Many of the villagers, mostly Chinese, were rubber tappers or farmers.

It probably is a *kampung* still by Kuala Lumpur's standards. Located in an obscure part of Petaling Jaya in an area spreading over 100 acres, most of the houses here, numbering about 600, still maintain their original facades.

The roads are retained at 20ft wide (as opposed to the current standard of 40ft) which are the original dimensions when they were formed. There are also a few *Kedai Pajak Gadai* (pawn shops) around, a familiar sight in small towns, as well as a wet market.

"The school here is the same one I attended, although it has been refurbished for a more conducive learning environment. It celebrates its 60th anniversary this year," says Lim, who is the school board chairman.

The chatty gentleman who is managing director of LBS Bina Group Bhd, a property development and investment holdings, is also credited for the upgrade of his hometown.

"Together with the local council, LBS Bina Group has developed part of Sungai Way, namely Plaza Seri Setia (where his office is located) and Pangsapuri Seri Setia. I don't see any other place in the area that can be developed.



DATO' LIM HOCK SAN



THE VILLAGE GROCER LOOKS LIKE A BLAST FROM THE PAST



THE SMALL ROAD AND HOUSES IN SERI SETIA RESEMBLE THAT OF A BYGONE ERA

“I also feel the residents here do not want their hometown to be redeveloped further.” Understandably so, since the quaint Seri Setia still has that laidback and inviting old world charm that’s nearly extinct in a fast-paced and progressive Kuala Lumpur. “I do miss the spirit of neighbourliness that came naturally and not considered a big deal back then. Now people have become more and more individualistic. Of course we know our neighbours but the

community spirit is diminishing.

“I guess this is common in developed and developing countries. It’s an expected phenomenon when livelihood and economy improve.”

Which also explains why most Kampung Seri Setia residents have gone out to live in bigger and better nearby residential areas like Sunway and Puchong.

“Many of the original resident villagers have made it good and moved on. They rent out their homes to foreign workers, especially those from Indonesia,” says Lim, who now lives near Tropicana while his parents are in Kelana Jaya.

But his Sungai Way roots remain intact.

“I’m glad to be a Sungai Way boy,” he notes, before raising his right hand and proudly exclaiming “*Sungai Way Boleh!*”

“It has made me who I am today. My father (Dato’ Seri Lim Bock Seng) came from a poor farming background in Fujian, China. He took care of my mum (Datin Seri Liew Sok Boon) and raised 11 children in a tiny wooden house with two rooms (which they shared with several other relatives!) by working from dawn to dusk.”

Lim’s father started his own *kedai kopi* (coffee shop) in the early 1960s in Puchong. Ironically, that same spot is now being developed by his company into a revolutionary concept of living on a resort island in the city called D’Island.

“We grew up without any material possessions but seeing our parents’ hard work, drive and determination pushed us to aim higher and chase our dreams,” says Lim who studied engineering in Britain. His siblings pursued their studies overseas too.

Father and son are also involved in charity work and community activities. Among others, Lim senior is Seri Setia Old Folks Home deputy chairman, Seri Setia Khuan Loke Club advisor and Youth Club Sungai Way advisor.

Lim junior is Chairman of the Board of Governors of SMJK Katholik and SJK (C) Sungai Way, the president of Persatuan Hokkien Seri Setia and the president of Selangor Petaling Business & Industry Association.

He attributes his care and concern for others to his father who instilled in him from young the spirit of giving, respecting the elders and keeping the family unit strong and close-knit.

“I’m already in Chinese New Year mood,” he says, smiling and sounding relieved the festive break is approaching. “I just can’t wait to have the many, many reunion dinners with family and friends. It’s really good to catch up with loved ones.

“There really is nothing like it. Even if you’re wealthy, life is worthless without family and friends.”



THE LIM FAMILY PORTRAIT TAKEN IN 1970 (HOCK SAN, IN WHITE SHIRT, IS SECOND FROM RIGHT)

FEATURE

Behind the gender issue

While women have progressed remarkably in many areas, the 30 per cent participation of the gender in decision-making positions as desired in the private sector is still far from satisfactory. What's more, in terms of closing the gender gap, there is much to be done, DAZMAN MANAN writes.

AS Malaysia moves forward towards becoming a fully developed nation, there is one key area which the country is critically lagging in.

Out of 135 countries, Malaysia is placed in the 100th position in the global *Gender Gap Index 2012* report published by the World Economic Forum.

The Index analyses the gap between men and women based on economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

"As we progress, we are also digressing in a very crucial area. It must be stressed that women play a big part in nation building and they should be given the opportunity to do so," says programmes manager of the All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Betty Yeoh.

In 2006, Malaysia was in the Index's 72nd spot, followed by 92nd in the next year after which it was placed 96th and then 100th, 98th, 97th and now back to the 100th position again.

Among the countries in the top 10 are Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, New Zealand, the Philippines and Nicaragua.

Yeoh feels that one of the main reasons Malaysia is sorely backward in this area is due to the lack of political empowerment of women. "Look at the number of women ministers we have in the cabinet – two!" she exclaims. "And of the 222 Members of Parliament that we have, less than 10 per cent are women. This goes to show that our women do not have the system to support and empower them politically.

"You ask any political party whether they're prepared to field women candidates and they'd immediately say yes. But, they'll make women contest against women. So most will lose. That's why women's participation is still very low."

Women have the ability to enhance and improve the administration. In fact, research has shown that female politicians stand up for policies that aid, assist and benefit the public more so than male politicians.

Late last month, the state of Selangor introduced a policy which states that 30 per cent of Council Members of Local Authorities have to comprise women.

Yeoh notes that it is a step forward but she also questions that while the opportunity is wide open, can women really access it given society's perception on them?

"We are still a very patriarchal society. Also, women are shy and apprehensive to come forward to voice out their views and share their concerns because they do not have the structure to support them.



'workshops to build women CEOs' are taking place. But my question is are we being holistic? Why don't we give every woman the opportunity to rise?"

Yeoh, who has been with the NGO since the start in 1985 (it was officially registered in 1988), observes that society still perceives women as being the archetype ideal of mother, wife and homemaker.

"This is true and we do not neglect that (our roles) but at the same time, the world is changing. You need to allow women to be both in the public sphere as well as support them in their private sphere. This is not happening.

"Mindsets have to be changed. Structure has to be empowering. There needs to be political will not just from the ruling party but also the other parties. Because in order to bring women up, it's really about the political will of all the political leaders."

All these require education and training.

What is sad, Yeoh laments, is that Malaysia ratified CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) in 1995 but to date only one report has been made. Each country is required to report on their progress to the CEDAW committee which

"Whether women can fill up this 30 per cent quota will depend on whether they are also given full support in terms of training and shaping them up for this position. It's a good policy but there are a lot of things that need to be looked into to make sure it really takes off."

A similar commitment was announced in 2004 when the government introduced its policy to have at least 30 per cent participation of women at decision-making positions in the public sector. "The aim to have 30 per cent women at decision-making positions in the public sector has almost achieved its target (it's now at about 28 per cent). However, in the private sector it is still unsatisfactory. Hence, the recent

consists of experts nominated by the United Nations' member states. Reporting takes place every four years.

"We are still very far back in terms of CEDAW reporting. And, officially we should have a law to enable CEDAW to become part of our everyday law."

But, she points out that there are some very good learned judges that have looked into the question of discrimination based on CEDAW.

"For example, there was a case of a temporary teacher whose contract was withdrawn the minute the Education Ministry found out she was pregnant.

"It was brought to court and the judge later awarded the case to her based on CEDAW's definition of discrimination. The ministry discriminated against her reproductive rights."

CEDAW is an international human rights treaty for women to make sure there's gender equality and non-violence. "When there is equality there definitely will be a reduction of violence," notes Yeoh.

AWAM identifies itself as a feminist organisation but that does not mean its members dislike or hate men, she assures. It seeks a just, democratic and equitable society so everyone, women in particular, are treated with respect and are free from all forms of violence and discrimination.

"The problems of women are also the problems of men. We need to sensitise and educate men to be supportive enough to see the situation and be able to remove gender stereotyping. It's not easy but it can be done – through education."

She recalls a male participant during one of the society's gender training workshops who was in total agreement with the society's principles. "He said it was not necessary for women to stay at home while men go out to work. Some of the other male participants jeered at his remark. He was man enough to admit his wife was earning more than he did. He supports his wife by taking care of the children while his wife goes to work."

As at 2011, the World Bank Report revealed that the female labour force participation rate in Malaysia was 47.9 per cent, which is below average of other East Asia and Pacific countries.

"It is ironic. We have four times the number of women as compared to men going into tertiary education and yet when they graduate there is still no increase in women's participation in employment.

"We are always pushing women back into the private sphere. They become the sole carer and bearer of children. While having to take care of their respective families, many also look after the elderly like their mothers and fathers. They would work for a number of years and later resign because of family duties."

There have been suggestions made to support working women especially those who are married so they can continue with their jobs even when they have children to care for.

"One of the proposed recommendations was to give tax exemptions to companies which give allowances to their female staff for childcare. This remains to be seen. If you want to maintain and retain these women you must make an effort to invest in them."



AWAM PRESIDENT (HOLDING FLAG) HO YOCK LIN AND YEOH (EXTREME RIGHT IN GLASSES) DURING THE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL CHARITY TREASURE HUNT IN PETALING JAYA LAST MONTH