



The old Kuala Lumpur Railway station is falling into disrepair but there are plans to revive the building. — Photos: RAJA FAISAL HISHAN, SAM THAM and BAVANI M/The Star

# Plans to return heritage buildings to former glory

The Star 26-8-19 2News 23E

Remedial work in pipeline for Kuala Lumpur station and KTMB premises

By BAVANI M  
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A HUGE regeneration and redevelopment project is in the pipeline to breathe new life into the Old Kuala Lumpur Railway Station (KLO) and Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd administrative (KTMB) buildings in Kuala Lumpur.

The transformation effort will include areas surrounding the two iconic landmarks that are the KLO and KTMB buildings.

There will be major improve-

ments and upgrades around Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin near Kampung Attap, particularly the roads leading to the KTM roundabout and underground tunnel that connects both stations. It is to improve links with the upcoming new developments too.

Railway Assets Corporation (RAC), the owner of all KTMB assets, is in the process of calling for tenders for the redevelopment project.

It is looking as well at appointing a lead consultant specialising in

heritage conservation.

At the same time, RAC is calling for tender for remedial work on the KLO building that is falling into disrepair.

RAC is currently on a mission to not just monetise its assets but to transform the area into the next hip and happening place.

RAC general manager Azhar Ahmad said KLO was at the top of its priority list because KLO and the KTMB administrative buildings were historical buildings of over 100 years old.

Both buildings have been gazetted as national heritage buildings under the Heritage Act 2005.

"It is no secret that KLO in particular is rapidly ageing, with some parts of its structure falling apart.

"KLO is our top priority, which is why we are calling for a tender for remedial work to prevent water penetration, which was the main cause of damage to the building," said Azhar.

He added that they hoped repairs could start before the end of this year.

KLO was built in 1892 at a cost of RM23,000, which was considered a significant sum back then, while the administrative building was built in 1917.

The buildings, designed by British architect Arthur Benison Hubback, feature Moorish and Mughal style in their design.

## Leveraging on the past

Apart from remedial work, RAC is also in the midst of appointing a lead consultant specialising in heritage conservation for restoration, refurbishment and revitalisation works on KLO and KTMB headquarters.

"In Europe, old towns are regarded as a national pride. Their assets are maintained and safeguarded for the future," said Azhar.

"Our train stations are valuable assets, we want to safeguard and monetise them."

He said RAC was established as a separate entity from KTMB, tasked to manage, maintain and develop railway assets.

KTMB is in charge of operation (train stations).



Heritage Hotel, located within the Kuala Lumpur train station, is in dismal state.

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# On track for makeover

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Tender has been called to restore and regenerate the 127-year-old Kuala Lumpur Railway Station and its younger sister — just over a century — the KTMB administrative building. The surrounding area, including the KTM roundabout and roads, will also be upgraded. >2&3



Grand dame: The Old Kuala Lumpur Railway Station looking impressive as ever from afar, but a closer inspection will reveal its age all too clearly. — RAJA FAISAL HISHAN/The Star



KTMB's administrative building is a heritage building and will undergo redevelopment.



Cobwebs covering one of the windows.

Paint has peeled off a part of the building and plants are growing on its wall.



A group of curious tourists looking through a broken window at the old train station.



Peeling paint on the walls of the Kuala Lumpur train station is obvious.

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RAC was incorporated in 1992 under the Railway Act 1991 as the Government wanted to separate railway assets and operations between RAC and KTMB.

RAC falls under the Transport Ministry and is the owner of assets such as land and infrastructure. "We used to have the biggest assets in the country, over 12,949ha of land around the railway. And the assets included the train stations themselves, which are also heritage buildings with a rich history," said Azhar.

Apart from KLO and KTMB, other heritage structures owned by RAC are the Ipoh station recently listed by National Heritage Department as a national heritage site, Seremban, Kuala Lipis and Johor Baru stations that have also been gazetted as heritage sites.

"The Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur stations were designed by the same architect and each station has its own unique charm. All of these unique qualities will be preserved," Azhar reassured.

**KLO in bad shape**

StarMetro visited the KLO station to find the grand old dame looking rather tired.

Cracks, peeling paint, mould and water ponding were visible everywhere.

Most of the retail shops and cafes have closed.

The former Heritage Hotel has been abandoned for more than a decade, and its 101 rooms are rotting away with dust and cobwebs noticeable everywhere. Azhar said things would change for the better.

"It was the first place I went to see when I joined RAC. There is a lot of work to do there," he admitted.



'Our train stations are valuable assets and we want to safeguard these assets and monetise them,' says Azhar.

"I want the regeneration to be like what they did for the King's Cross and St Pancras Railway stations in London.

"We will maintain the facade but change the ambience.

"The revitalisation works for both buildings will include commercial and retail strategies aimed at turning KLO into a destination of choice."

"This will not only boost tourism and cultural sectors but increase foot traffic and ridership that will impact the railway industry in a positive way."

**Choosing the best**

"We will look at proposals that offer the best returns for RAC," Azhar said, not dispelling the possibility of a joint-venture agreement or even a long-term lease agreement.

"It must be a company with the technical and financial capabilities to do the job.

"We will not tolerate subleasing. It has to be for investment and sustainability."



The Kuala Lumpur train station is a National Heritage site.

**What can be expected**

"Nothing is set yet but we are looking at a mix of commercial, retail, restaurants and hotel... a lifestyle hub like KL Sentral.

"We are trying to persuade Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to close the KTM roundabout and make it fully pedestrianised," said Azhar.

He is optimistic that fruits of RAC's labour can be seen in three years.

When asked about the cost, he said: "I cannot answer that, not even a ballpark figure but it is going to be major!"

"When dealing with heritage assets, you know that means special care and special materials which are going to cost big," he said.

Azhar said once the project was completed, the current KTMB administrative office would be relocated to Brickfields where a new building would be constructed on a vacant land near YMCA.

He disclosed this project too would be mixed development on KTMB land.

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