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**INFRASTRUCTURE, SEWERAGE
 AND RIVER REHABILITATION**
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TEXT BY
 Ar Ahmad Nizam Radzi

The Beautification & Rehabilitation of Malacca River

(ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT)

» The vibrant history of Malacca is often understated; the history books rarely do justice with their descriptions of what a grand port city it was in its heyday. Consider these facts: Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last monarch of Malacca, was a contemporary of Michelangelo Buonarroti. Malacca was already at its zenith even as the Medici family was commissioning Florentine artists to build their palazzo halfway around the world. Malacca's fame had spread to the shores of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, prompting the Portuguese to consider *Goa* insufficient to maintain its monopoly of the spice trade. Malacca had to be conquered at all costs if the Portuguese were to hold 'the throat of Venice', as Tome Pires (1468 - 1540), the medieval Portuguese writer had written.

Violent battles were fought between the Sultanate and the Portuguese that had seen plunder, killings and torture on both sides. With the sophisticated Portuguese armoury that the natives had never seen nor imagined, Malacca was finally taken by force in 1511, thus ending the glorious period of the Sultanate and allowing the earliest Europeans a colony in Southeast Asia for the first time in history.

Throughout this tumultuous period of our history, the Malacca River flowed calmly, silently witnessing the legendary Hang Tuah galloping away on his horse, the bustling markets of Indian, Chinese and Arab traders, the razing of the *Sultan's* palace, the sacking of the city and the laborious construction of the *A Famosa* fort. Since its heyday, the Malacca river has slowly degenerated from an important historical lifeline to a large sewage drain that nobody wants to see. With haphazard construction on the river banks (featured in the 1999 Connery/Zeta-Jones movie 'Entrapment'), many are forgiven to forget that the 'drain' they cross over every day is the same waterway that had witnessed 500 years of the city's glorious and violent history.

In view of this, the Malacca State Government, through the city's local authority, decided that the Malacca river should be given a new lease of life befitting its historical status. The beautification and rehabilitation of the Malacca river will be implemented in phases with the following objectives:

- To ensure that the riverfront retains strong links with the city's heritage
- Creating opportunities to initiate lively riverside activities along the river for commercial and tourism purposes
- To enhance and reinforce the riverfront character as an integral part of life for the city of Malacca
- To introduce pockets of gardens and spaces, proper and wide paved esplanade walks complemented by landscape design
- Introducing new vehicular and pedestrian bridges, jetties and waterfront activities to rejuvenate the maritime history of the city
- Introducing an interceptor sewer to channel all raw sewage, rubbish and debris away from flowing into the river
- Possible introduction of a barrage system to control the water level of the river from tide changes

Phase 1 of the project has already been completed and comprises of the following revitalized sections:


The Spice Garden. This is the start of the development upriver, located at the Hang Jebat Bridge. It is marked by a pavilion built in vernacular Malacca style, surrounded by terraces of planting comprising of edible spices and fragrant ethno-botanical species such as lemongrass, daun kesum, tunjuk langit and ginger. The Spice Garden serves as a symbolic homage to the important role it has played in the city's trade and economy centuries ago.

The Esplanade, Kampung Morten. Across the river from the historical Malay settlement of Kampung Morten,

a paved esplanade walk has been built that makes it possible to walk from the Spice Garden at Hang Jebat Bridge to the Medan Selera at Jalan Bunga Raya. This has now become a favourite relaxing riverfront walkway strip for residents as they enjoy the view of Kampung Morten across the river.

The Boardwalk. The walk continues after Medan Selera via a boardwalk structure, which is elevated from the soft, muddy banks of the river. This ensures the continued survival of the existing riverine vegetation such as mangrove palms and freshwater creatures such as mudskippers and the water lizards. Under phase 2, the boardwalk route will continue towards the Hang Tuah Bridge.

Jalan Laksamana Esplanade. This riverfront development starts from the current Medan Mara all the way parallel to Jalan Laksamana up to the Stadthuys plaza. It involves the rehabilitation of several old shop houses along the river by dismantling the chaotic illegal extensions erected over the decades and rebuilding some of the walls using the same bricks. The shop houses are now reinforced, enhanced and adapted to a new, commercial use while maintaining their distinctive 'straits' character. The original laterite stones that had been used by the British and the Dutch, found in the river, were re-used in parts of the new embankment.

Phase 1 of the rehabilitation of the Malacca river was successfully completed in the middle of 2005 in time for the Conference of Rulers and Hari Raya Open House gathering in late 2005 while Phase 2 is currently under construction. Further phased implementation of rehabilitation in the future will result in a clean and controlled water level for boating and cruising activities. City residents and tourists will enjoy a continuous riverfront walk from Hang Jebat Bridge upriver, all the way to the tourist areas of the old port near the Syed Abdul Aziz bridge. 



1 Night view of the rehabilitated shop houses of Jalan Laksamana, reflected on the river
2 The walkway adjacent to the shop houses of Jalan Laksamana, near the Stadthuys plaza
3 The riverfront at the Spice Garden, where the walk starts upriver from Hang Jebat Bridge