

# Learning from past developments to achieve a brighter future



## Realty Check

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AUGUST marked our 54th year of Merdeka and on Sept 16, we celebrated Malaysia Day to commemorate the establishment of the Malaysian federation in 1963.

The grassroots of Malaysian (Malaya then) development can be traced to Pre-World War II and as far back as 1884 when Frank Swettenham, the British resident of Selangor introduced building regulations and town planning guidelines as control measures in all building activities.

The first shop houses in Kuala Lumpur were built also in the same year and had, ever since, undergone transitions from simple attap huts to utilitarian architecture, neoclassical and art deco, an eclectic artistic and design style that began in Paris in the 1920s. Frank Swettenham was also responsible in introducing five-foot way – a dedicated walkway along the shops, which enabled pedestrians to walk under covered walkway protected from the sun and rain, which has remained in use until today.

The most prominent architecture in Malaya then was the Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad, which was built in 1897 to house government departments during the British administration. This building fronts the Selangor Club Padang (Dataran

Merdeka today), where the Union Jack flag was lowered and the Malaysian Flag lifted for the first time at midnight of Aug 31 1957. The setting up of the first Official Town Planning Committee was in the year 1913 and ten years later it led to the formation of the first Town Planning Enactment.

Early post independence years witnessed development efforts initiated and championed by our first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. The first Rancangan Malaysia (1st Malaysia Plan) was introduced in 1966 with the prime objective of promoting the welfare of all citizens and identifying measures to develop the Malaysian economy.

Suleiman Court, located at the junction of Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Jalan Dang Wangi, was the first high-rise residential building constructed in 1957 providing affordable low-cost flats for people within Kuala Lumpur before it was demolished in 1986 to make way for modern retail development – Sogo Shopping Mall. Federal Hotel in Bukit Bintang was the first international-class hotel in Kuala Lumpur that began operation just three days before Merdeka catering for local and foreign dignitaries.

The baby boomer era marked various projects being planned in Kuala Lumpur. Another prominent structure completed in this era was the National Mosque built in 1965 on the site of former Venning Road Brethren Gospel Hall. Meanwhile, Bangsar Park was the first planned housing area to be developed

in Kuala Lumpur on the former Bangsar Estate in 1969.

Due to growing population in Kuala Lumpur, the idea of satellite town emerged, leading to the establishment of Petaling Jaya. The first phase of Petaling Jaya development was constructed in 1952 with 800 residential units and is referred to today as PJ Old Town. In addition, the early roads built in Petaling Jaya were simply named Jalan 1 and Jalan 2, which were later renamed Jalan Templer and Jalan Othman respectively.

The 70's saw the first attempt of Malaysia gearing towards becoming a modern economy nation led by Bapa Pembangunan Malaysia, Tun Abdul Razak. The introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) following the outbreak of civil disturbance in 1969 has significantly improved the Malaysian economy and subsequently prompted more property developments to take place in Malaysia.

More investments flowed into the country during Tun Abdul Razak's and later Tun Hussein Onn's premierships. Pertama Complex and Ampang Park were among the earliest shopping malls completed in the 1970's. In addition, the Town and Country Planning Act was introduced in 1976.

Malaysia's development entered a new chapter in the 1980's and 1990's, thanks to the visionary Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed. The growing economy gave rise to various programs and mega-projects and had helped to position Malaysia as one of the fastest developing

nations in Asia. The NEP was followed by the New Development Policy (NDP), which was later known as Vision 2020 with the prime objective of transforming Malaysia into a fully industrialised country and to quadruple per capita income by year 2020. Many new office towers were constructed in the 1980's including Wisma See Hoy Chan, UBN Tower, Dayabumi, Kenanga International and Wisma Genting among others, which have become operational headquarters of multinational companies. Modern architecture began to influence local architects and the Uniform Building by Laws was in place in 1984.

The official opening of refurbished Pasar Budaya was also noted in 1986 on the site of the former wet market which was originally operational in 1888. National landmark, Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) or Petronas Twin Towers was completed in 1998 and has ever since become the most famous super-prime office building in Malaysia.

The development of KLCC, which is on the site of the former turf club, has significantly spurred growth in its surrounding as more office towers have been constructed, particularly to provide space for Petronas-related business activities. This has further strengthened Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle Area as the nation's prime commercial hub.

The *Malaysia Boleh* aspiration continues, exemplified by other mega-projects including Putrajaya, Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Light Rail Transit (LRT), and Sepang F1. Nonetheless, we should not forget

the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis, which had badly hit our economy. Out of the box measures initiated by the government had brought Malaysia out of the recession.

To decentralise growth, the various development corridors introduced by Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi have attracted international investors to venture outside Kuala Lumpur. Iskandar Malaysia, for example, is touted as the most advanced and ambitious master plan aiming to transform southern Johor into a modern and vibrant city that offers outstanding investment opportunities to be at par with our nearest neighbour, Singapore.

Today, under the leadership of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia is on the right track towards achieving developed and high-income nation status by year 2020. The Economic Transformation Program (ETP) supported by various Entry Point Projects (EPPs) will significantly boost our local property scene.

As patriotic Malaysians, we should embrace our history. We should honour the efforts of our forefathers and dignify our independence by working closely to propel our nation's economic growth. Trifling affairs should be put aside and we should walk as Malaysians and together march towards achieving a developed, modern and holistic Malaysia. *Salam Kemerdekaan.*

● *Senator Datuk Abdul Rahim Rahman is the executive chairman of Rahim & Co group of companies.*