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Shooting for the top

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MALAYSIA is one of the few places in South East Asia where land cost doesn't prohibit us from making elegant skyscraping statements. Elsewhere, the high prices of terra firma demand efficiency of space, resulting in blockish structures guided under a principal that "form must follow value". The result - buildings differentiated only by the cladding they don.

That buildings are more identifiable in Malaysia is the result of their architects' ability to articulate design in a language written by shape and style: Kuala Lumpur's Menara Shahzan, now known as Menara Prime, Wisma Goldhill, Bangunan LUTH and the Petronas Twin Towers are but some examples.

In the Klang Valley's suburban commercial precincts, where freehold land is worth less than KL's Golden Triangle, this means locations with the permissible plot ratio to create highrises can boast some striking icons.

Menara Telekom in Pantai Baru, midway between Petaling Jaya and KL city and overlooking the Federal Highway Route II, is such a representation, with its 310m tall curvilinear structure reflecting everything its owner is, and everything it aspires to become.

Its shape, inspired by a bamboo shoot, reflects strength and the flexibility to adapt to changing times, while the "shoot" aspect signifies its growth aspirations. For these reasons, Menara Telekom is not just a building, nor even a work of art. Instead, it embodies the very characteristics that make up our country. And since the building is built to have a high level of intelligence, the point becomes even more meaningful.

Designed by internationally recognised architect Hijjas Kasturi, the corporate headquarters of Telekom Malaysia Bhd is the place for businesses requiring an office with six-star infrastructure that promotes productivity and efficiency.

Even its access is top grade, in the form of free-flowing traffic circulation made possible by the upgrading of the roads in and around the Pantai-Bangsar area, as well as the presence of the Putra LRT-system, which has a stop in the neighbouring Plaza Pantai.

Internally, the skyscraper's 906,743sq ft of nett lettable office space is facilitated by a gamut of facilities that offer 21st century efficiency for the businesses it houses.

The column-free space comes with raised flooring to enable under-floor supply of centralised air-conditioning, fibre-optic data, voice and fax communications, electrical wiring, as well as a central vacuuming system.

While most offices are more used to ceiling mounted air-con ventilation, Menara Telekom has adopted aeration from the ground, presumably to improve energy efficiency and to cool occupants faster.

"We can reposition any under-floor vent for maximum effectiveness if a tenant provides us with its intended layout plan," said a Telekom spokesperson.

Outside the rentable office area, which is separated into two wings on each floor, tenants have access to washrooms, pantries and a document conveying system that functions to transport and distribute documents and parcels from a common hub in the building to all floors. Another unique feature is the presence of skygardens - 21 in total - situated on every third floor to allow tenants to "go out for a breather" and to soften the

skyscraper's hard lines.

For added convenience, the building is also equipped with a three-and-a-half-level basement carpark that can accommodate 1,700 cars and 300 motorcycles, and a facilities centre incorporating childcare and medical services, a multi-purpose hall and a gym with squash courts. An auditorium with a seating capacity of 1,500 is also expected to be ready in a year's time, while an internal food court on level three is scheduled to be operational in two months' time.

Vertical ascension in Menara Telekom is by way of 18 double-decked and three single-deck lifts. Servicing the tower's four office zones, the lifts will be primarily used by Telekom and its subsidiaries, which will occupy 65 per cent of the space, while the balance, amounting to 307,797sq ft situated from the 30th to the 49th floors, have been set aside for rental to established tenants.

Due to recent media attention following the official launch of Menara Telekom by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Telekom spokesperson said there has been a surge of interest by prospective tenants. Offices that have already signed leases here include international shipping company Hapag-Lloyd (8,116sq ft), the IT division of Tenaga Nasional Bhd (19,365sq ft) and luxury car manufacturer, Daimler-Chrysler (28,245sq ft). Meanwhile negotiations are ongoing with prospective tenants such as Unilever and Penerbangan Malaysia Bhd.

While present times might prompt other landlords to sub-divide their space to attract smaller businesses, Telekom's insistence that it will only lease space based on the size of the floor plate in each wing means that the smallest office available is 2,164sq ft on the 44th floor. For the other floors, space ranges from 6,760sq ft to about 11,700sq ft.

At a monthly offered rate of RM3.50psf inclusive of service charge, the rent might, at first glance, seem like a princely sum, especially in view of the surplus vacant office space in KL. But if you were to consider the efficiency the building provides, and the level of corporate status it inculcates to the business community, the price might seem like a small one to pay for climbing on board one of the country's symbols of progress.