

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE ON TALL
BUILDINGS AT EQUATORIAL HOTEL, JALAN
SULTAN ISMAIL, KUALA LUMPUR ON 2ND
DECEMBER, 1974

Mr Chairman, Hon'ble Ministers, Datuk Bandar of Kuala Lumpur,
Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am extremely happy to accept the invitation of the Organising Committee to officially declare open the Conference on Tall Buildings. This is the first time such a Conference is held in Kuala Lumpur and we feel highly honoured to be hosts for this meeting.

I would like to congratulate the Organising Committee for the meticulous preparation they have made for this Conference particularly the impressive volume of Conference papers. I hope they are equally meticulous in looking after our so many guests from overseas.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As you all are aware, one of the significant features of the modern metropolis is the manifold increase in the number of tall buildings in almost all major cities of the developing world. This, as we well know, is due to pressure of space in the case of some cities. There is very little room for horizontal expansion and thus the only alternative is to go up vertically. Our capital, Kuala Lumpur, is no exception and I am sure some of you who knew Kuala Lumpur in the fifties will notice the remarkable change in our skyline. But, of course, space alone is not the only main reason why most cities now are dotted with such high rise structures.

In the first place, I must stress that these structures come into existence in order to meet the pressing social and economic needs of the urban population. Cities which formerly were in the region of less than half a million people are now becoming too congested due both to natural increase and the inevitable urban drift. The lure to the cities, with their bright lights and gay living, as was envisaged by this population exodus, has brought about in its

wake social and economic problems. Slums and squatter settlements grow like mushrooms all over the place which, besides causing nightmare to city-planners, also pose a threat to the stability of the country.

As responsible Government, we cannot ignore this problem and the burden falls mainly on our City Fathers. We have to clear these squalid living areas and give our people habitable and comfortable living quarters. This is the ultimate goal of our Urban Renewal Policy. With the limitation of land space, we have to resort to creating tall and high-rise buildings.

I am sure you will agree with me that facilities and services can easier be given in schemes of this nature as the pressure on resources will not be that heavy. I realise that there are inconveniences in respect to living in high rise housing especially when it comes to the question of recreation. In this respect, I would like to urge all those involved in urban renewal schemes to take special note that open spaces and recreational areas be created to meet the social needs of the scheme concerned. In my travels abroad, I have noticed how some cities attach a lot of importance to these facilities, for instance, parks and green areas have become a notable feature in these cities.

It is of vital importance therefore to place emphasis on this aspect of human needs. However, we should not, in our eagerness to resettle the depressed areas, create, on the other hand, what is virtually modern slums. I hope, in your deliberations, you will devote much of your time to consider these problems. I know that several papers presented at this Conference will touch on the social and human aspects of high-rise living and I am sure this will be given sufficient attention and you should not treat them as being mere incidental problems.

This is now, however, to state that the technical aspects of the problem are of lesser importance. Of course, they all are. This is particularly true in respect of the security and safety of the occupants.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have directed the Ministry concerned that urban renewal projects be carried out immediately. In carrying this out, several problems will have to be overcome. Presently, any urban renewal

scheme requires a sizeable area in order to adequately meet the purpose. The old structures where each building occupies a frontage of twenty feet or so is no longer a project that is viable and desirable.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Another aspect of the development of tall buildings that I would like to touch upon concerns areas of large population concentration. The present trend is towards multi-purpose complexes of mixed development which could include shops, restaurants, office space, apartments, etc. This would serve to take away off-street parking, provided adequate car parking facilities are available and proper ingress and egress are designed.

Various factors would determine the density and therefore the height in urban centres. In Kuala Lumpur in the past, the buildings in the central commercial areas were limited to four-storey high. This was not sufficiently attractive for land owners to develop or redevelop land in the central commercial area. To stimulate development, the Government decided to lift this restriction, provided other conditions in respect of car parking facilities were met. This move by the Government has meant a change in the skyline of our capital city but it has also brought in its wake attendant traffic problems.

Certain parts of Kuala Lumpur and the other major towns are now ripe for development or redevelopment. High-rise buildings in the traditional lots with twenty foot road frontage would however be an anachronism. Every facility must be given to amalgamate such lots into larger units for the development of high-rise buildings. Land offices should, therefore, simplify the procedure for amalgamation.

Various considerations must be made when tall buildings are planned. They should be aesthetically pleasing, structurally sound and adequate safety measures particularly fire prevention measures should be incorporated. The question of traffic management and adequate car parking facility should also be a major consideration. In this country, we are fortunate in that we have ample land available and there is no acute pressure to build to the sky. However, proper development of tall buildings would result in the maximum utilization of infrastructure expenditure for roads,

sewerage systems and electrification. Government agencies and private developers in developing tall buildings should also strive to achieve national policies in the restructuring of society.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I hope, as I have said earlier, that the participants of this Conference will not merely concentrate in the physical aspects of tall buildings but also apply their minds to the problems and the change in the quality of life that would result. It has been noted in other countries that living in tall buildings has given rise to a change in inter-personal relations and I hope that in considering the problems of tall buildings, you will also give due attention to this aspect of the problem. We must not merely think of the buildings alone but also of the people who live and use them and how it would affect the pattern of their lives.

I am confident that your deliberations will result in policy guidelines so that tall buildings can be planned to blend with our Malaysian scenery and provide reasonably pleasant and comfortable living for our people.

With these remarks, I have much pleasure in declaring this Conference on Tall Buildings open and to wish a successful and fruitful conference.