



**Najib defends 100-storey mega-tower
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Prime Minister Najib Razak defended his plans for a 100-storey megatower in Kuala Lumpur after a backlash on a fast-expanding *Facebook* petition and criticism from the opposition.

Najib unveiled plans for the tower to be built by 2020 at a cost of RM5 billion, during last week's budget speech that included a number of grand infrastructure projects.

The building, named 'Warisan Merdeka' or 'Heritage of Independence', would be the tallest in Malaysia, dwarfing the iconic Petronas Twin Towers, which were the world's tallest buildings at 88 storeys when completed in 1998.

Najib has said such projects exemplify the spirit of "Malaysia Boleh" or "Malaysia Can", a national campaign conceived by former premier Mahathir Mohamad, an advocate of mega projects.

Mahathir, whose own schemes included the Proton national car and the multi-billion-dollar administrative capital Putrajaya - both of which have failed to thrive - has warmly endorsed the new skyscraper.

But a *Facebook* page created last Saturday, to which about 11,000 people had signed up by this afternoon, has seen an outpouring of criticism from Malaysians who say the money would be better spent elsewhere.

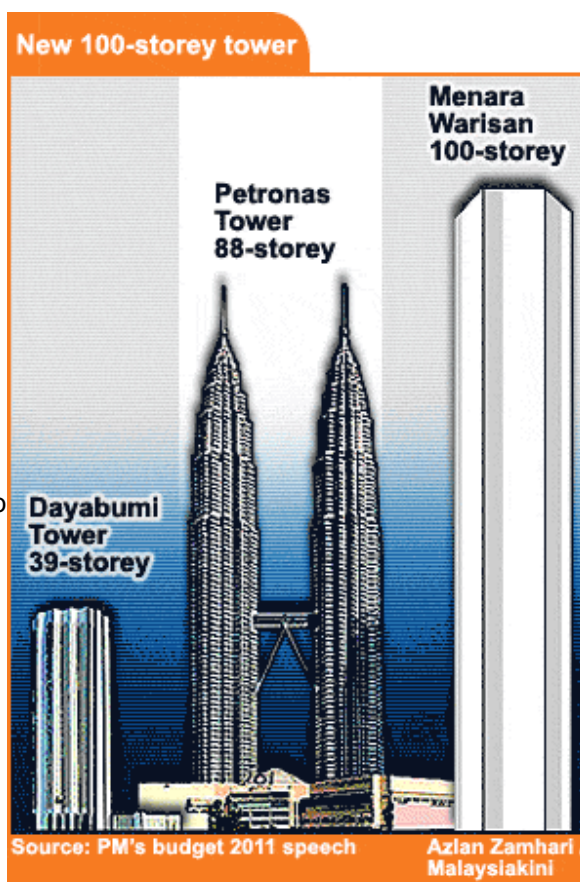
"Malaysia needs better education, better health care, better public transportation, safer neighbourhoods, cleaner water, but not a taller building. We don't need another white elephant!" said the page, which was receiving hundreds more members each hour.

Many of those posting comments accused the ruling coalition of spending taxpayers' money to boost its own standing, which has slipped badly in recent years in the face of a resurgent opposition.

"I will support this project if you give me the contract!" said a Facebook user named Chee Chuan Tat, referring to endemic cronyism linked to the BN coalition.

"It's taxpayers' money, and taxpayers say NO," said Adrian Matthew Yee.

Petronas Towers drew criticism too



Najib stoutly defended the project, and said the Petronas Towers - now a much-loved national symbol - had originally attracted similar criticism.



"We want a building that will be a symbol of the country that is not only modern but progressive and it will have a multiplier effect on the economy," he told a press conference.

"We want the area to become a business hub," he said. "So this project is not a waste but is one which will benefit the people."

Opposition MP Fong Kui Lun, in whose constituency the building would be located near the city's Chinatown, said it would be an eyesore and totally unsuited to the crowded downtown district.

"What the building will do is to destroy the character of the area while creating a traffic nightmare for all," he told *AFP*.

"There are more than enough office spaces in downtown KL and this will cause a glut of office space, becoming a white elephant like many of the other government projects."

Tony Pua, also from the Democratic Action Party which is part of the opposition alliance, said the online criticism was a sign that people were concerned.

"The country does not need another mega project as the era of mega projects is gone and most Malaysians are not impressed by them any more," he said.

- *AFP*

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