

MERDEKA 118, KL'S NEW LANDMARK DESTINATION

Overlooking the most historically significant places in the city, Permodalan Nasional Bhd's development has been conceived, planned and developed to encapsulate the nation's beginnings and, more crucially, its aspirations for the future

Permodalan Nasional Bhd's (PNB) Merdeka 118 tower is set to add a distinctive mark to the Kuala Lumpur skyline. The 118-storey tower, upon its completion in 2022, will be the first building to obtain triple platinum green building accreditations both locally and internationally. At a height of 635m, it will be the second-tallest tower in the world.

For Malaysians and Klang Valley residents, what will set the multi-faceted Merdeka 118 apart from other tall buildings in KL's already architecturally stunning skyline is its unique spire. Positioned at the side of its highest peak, its design is a nod to the origins of its name.

PNB group chairman Tan Sri Dr. Zeti Aziz says the tower overlooks one of the most important places in KL in terms of the country's history — Stadium Merdeka — giving rise to its name. "It is a tribute to the location where our independence was proclaimed, where 20,000 people uttered the word 'Merdeka' in 1957. And '118' represents the number of floors in the tower. It will become the tallest building in Southeast Asia."

She adds that the name not only refers to the nation's beginnings, but also its current state, as reflected in the building's modern design. "The spire, which is at one side at the top of the building, symbolises the hand raised when independ-

ence was declared. It also reflects us reaching out for our future, to the sky beyond [to reach] our potential," she says.

From the outset, Zeti says, it was PNB's vision to create an iconic landmark building in the city. "We saw it as an opportunity to unlock the value when the land was acquired in the year 2000. It is to create a focal point within the area for commerce, culture and the preservation of our heritage.

"This is for our future generations to know about how we came to achieve our independence, about our heritage and how we have progressed over the years. Through this, they will not only know about the modern Malaysia of today but also about our past and how we built the country over time, what we have achieved and what we aspire to achieve in the future."

The surrounding area, she notes, is also very special. "There are many old firsts here. There is the Chin Woo Stadium, which houses the first Olympic-sized swimming pool in the country. There is also one of the oldest secondary schools established in 1893, the Victoria Institution (VI). Not too far away is the recently regenerated and revived Rex Cinema that was completed in 1947, a place that I did go to when I was a teenager," she says. These buildings, she adds, reflect the old part of KL and make up the historical fabric of the address.

Located near Chinatown in KL, the Merdeka 118 development spans a total of 40 acres, with half of this land area comprising Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara. The remaining components, which will be built in phases, include the 118-storey tower, a mall, linear park, textile gallery, childcare centre, mosque and three residential towers.

Construction of the first phase of the project, comprising the 118-storey tower and infrastructure for the surrounding area, as well as the second phase, comprising the mall and linear park, is already underway. Both the tower and the mall are expected to be ready for occupation in the third quarter of 2022. The final component of the development, Merdeka Residences, is set for completion in 2025/26.

A development like no other

PNB president and group chief executive Ahmad Zulqarnain Onn says the Merdeka 118 tower has about 1.66 million sq ft of net lettable office space and about one million sq ft of retail space. He adds that PNB and its group of companies will take up about 600,000 sq ft, and the state-owned fund management company is in fairly advanced negotiations with a number of tenants for the remaining office space.

Given that the Merdeka 118 tower is still under

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Design inspiration

"The message in our client's first communicate to us was refreshingly simple: Would we be interested in assisting PNB with designing a tall tower in KL? Our answer was obviously 'yes!' and then, as we moved forward after engagement, the detailed design brief quickly evolved. It was clearly stated that the tower, despite its height, should not in any way detract from the presence and importance of Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara. The design was not to superficially replicate traditional Malaysian architecture but rather be a confident statement of Malaysia's modernisation and future global presence.

"Merdeka 118 is designed outwardly as an extremely tall crystalline form, which pragmatically mitigates wind pressures. This complex form is made up of varying arrays and sizes of triangular glass panels, which follow the bracing lines of the structure, creating harmony between architectural form and structure. The triangular facets of the building are inspired by the patterns often found in the songket materials of Malaysia and refer symbolically to the diverse ethnicities that form Malaysia's rich culture.

"The roof of the building morphs into a 120m-high perforated steel-clad spire, also crystalline in shape, forming an integral component of the building's design. It further marks from afar this hallowed place within the city, and has already become fondly adopted by the community as a direct reference to the moment that Tunku Abdul Rahman raised his hand in triumph when declaring Malaysia's independence on 31 August 1957. To me, this is a very satisfying example of a building being embraced to add another layer of rich legend to the city."

— Karl Fender,

Architect of Merdeka 118,
founding partner of Fender Katsalidis Architects



"[Merdeka 118] is a tribute to the location where our independence was proclaimed, where 20,000 people uttered the word 'Merdeka' in 1957." — Zeti

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construction, this is also a plus, he notes. "We understand that due to the pandemic, new SOPs are being implemented in office spaces. As Merdeka 118 has yet to be fully built, PNB has the opportunity to include appropriate contactless features in the design of our office spaces," he says. Some of the features being considered include contactless technology such as facial recognition, digital body temperature checks and QR code access for visitors.

As for the mall, which will be ready for occupancy by mid-2022, he says it will span across seven floors and be connected to the tower's observation deck — the highest of its kind in the region. "We have carefully thought out the visitor experience so that when visitors start the journey to the observation deck from the mall, they will get a bit of the history of KL and insights into the Merdeka 118 development.

"Upon reaching the top, they will be met with spectacular 360° views of the KL skyline. Thrill seekers will be able to walk on glass floors with nothing but the city below, and the truly exceptional thrill seeker can put on a harness and walk outside the tower, weather and wind permitting. Even the spire will be a tourist attraction — you can climb up the structure and take a selfie or wifie when you reach the highest point of the tower at over 550m."

Descending from the observation deck, visitors will arrive at the third floor of the mall, dubbed the "Malaysian Artisan District" floor. "It is important that we position this mall differently in the market with our unique offerings, and this floor will be one of the key factors that will differentiate us," he says. The space will provide the ideal platform for emerging and talented local artisans and designers to showcase their craft to those who appreciate art, culture and possess a proud-to-be-Malaysian attitude, he adds.

Zeti says the emphasis has always been on the



"We are putting together different parts of a city lifestyle where you can work, live, play, be healthy and be entertained."

— Ahmad Zulqarnain



Park Hyatt Hotel will occupy the top 17 floors of the tower

mall being distinctive and differentiated. "The team has worked very hard and is continually challenged to create destinations in the mall that are distinctive and differentiated, that you cannot find anywhere else in KL," she says.

Pointing to the fourth level of the mall, Ahmad Zulqarnain says it will boast Asia's largest 88m-diameter glass dome, which echoes the dome design of Stadium Negara.

Other unique elements in the development include the linear park at the foot of the tower called the Merdeka Boulevard at 118. "To one side is Stadium Merdeka and on the other side is Masjid Merdeka. At the end of the linear park is a two-storey building called Look at 118, with a café inside and a dedicated lookout point on the rooftop, as well as a textile gallery nestled within the same building. At the lookout point, you can have an uninterrupted, magnificent view of the tower beyond the park," he says.

Infrastructure is being put in place to allow tour buses to drop tourists off for a visit to Look at 118, buy a cup of coffee and croissant, take pictures and then get back on the bus to continue their journey to the main building, where they can then go up the observation deck or the mall.

Stadium Merdeka as the centrepiece

As remarkable as these new features are, the gems of the Merdeka 118 precinct are undoubtedly Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara. Ahmad Zulqarnain says these two buildings set Merdeka 118 apart from other addresses in the city centre.

Stadium Merdeka, he reiterates, is the centrepiece of the Merdeka 118 precinct. "We are putting together different parts of a city lifestyle where you can work, live, play, be healthy and be entertained. Eventually, once Stadium Negara is reactivated with events and concerts, we will be able to enhance the activities available within the precinct. There is no location like this in Malaysia today," he adds.

The architect for the Merdeka 118 tower was similarly impressed with the site and the significance of the heritage buildings and the surroundings. Karl Fender, founding partner of Fender Katsalidis Architects, says: "On discovering the importance of Stadium Merdeka and its precinct in the context of Malaysia's journey to independence, [I realised] the obligation to provide sen-



PNB is committed to investing in building new infrastructure as well as upgrading the existing infrastructure surrounding the precinct to ensure seamless connectivity and accessibility, says Ahmad Zulqarnain

will also be ensured by using non-toxic paint and adhesives. An optimal indoor atmosphere promoting natural light, along with daylight glare control, acoustic optimisation and temperature control, is all part of the strategy to make the workplace a more conducive environment for our colleagues," says Ahmad Zulqarnain.

The many green initiatives at Merdeka 118 include solar panels sufficient for the entire hot water supply needs of the Park Hyatt hotel, LED lighting throughout the building, rainwater capture for irrigation and greywater capture for reuse.

"Merdeka 118 will be self-sufficient through our greywater capture system, which will collect and treat used water and send it back to the tower for reuse (in washrooms). The precinct will also employ an irrigation system that will utilise greywater and rainwater to water the outdoor greenery within the precinct," says Ahmad Zulqarnain.

Apart from Merdeka 118's multiple public transit connections, within the development will be bicycle parking bays and amenities such as lockers and showers for cycling commuters as well as prioritised parking for fuel-efficient or hybrid vehicles.

PNB has set a target for more than 30% of the materials used for the construction of the tower to be recycled materials such as concrete, steel

sitive, appropriate future placemaking in this location."

PNB, Ahmad Zulqarnain adds, is dedicated to conserving both stadiums, and established the Merdeka Heritage Trust (MHT) in 2007 for that very purpose. MHT works together with Badan Warisan Malaysia, whose meticulous conservation efforts earned Stadium Merdeka the UNESCO Award of Excellence for Cultural Heritage Conservation Programme in 2008.

Restoration activities at the stadium include the removal of the seating terraces for a larger seating capacity of 45,000 for the 1989 SEA Games to the original capacity of 20,000, removal of the rubberised track and reinstallation of the football field, reconstruction of the display board to its original form in 1957, restoration of the floor tiles at the main entrance using mosaic tiles, and the installation of new carpets in all three VIP rooms to match those used in 1957.

For Zeti, the restoration of Stadium Merdeka to its former glory has brought back happy memories. "When I was a student in the 1960s, sometime soon after independence, schoolchildren used to perform on Merdeka Day at Stadium Merdeka. We would also sit on the benches in the stadium. So I have seen how the stadium looked originally. Now, seeing it after it has been restored to its original state actually brings great excitement," she says.

Connectivity and accessibility

Ahmad Zulqarnain says PNB is committed to investing in building new infrastructure as well as upgrading the existing infrastructure surrounding the precinct to ensure seamless connectivity and accessibility. Through its wholly-owned subsidiary PNB Merdeka Ventures Sdn Bhd, the builders of Merdeka 118, PNB has collaborated with a team of international consultants, architects, engineers and local experts to draw up the necessary infrastructure plans.

"Great cities have space for multiple great buildings, so if we think of New York, the tallest building there is the Freedom Tower, but they also have the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, and all of them are very close to the hearts of New Yorkers. KL will also be similar, with an inspiring skyline that will have multiple iconic buildings, including Merdeka 118 and the Petronas Twin Towers.

"We have carefully planned for smooth traffic flow using multiple entry and exit points rather than a 'one-way system' encircling the precinct. To increase accessibility by road, we are constructing the Belfield Tunnel, which gives visitors direct access to Merdeka 118 from Jalan Syed Putra off the Federal Highway. Further road improvements have also been added to ease access towards Jalan Stadium and Jalan Hang Jebat. Merdeka 118

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BUILDING OF THE FUTURE

Once completed, the Merdeka 118 tower will be the first building to obtain triple green platinum building accreditations locally and internationally, ensuring its sustainability and relevance

Permodalan Nasional Bhd president and group chief executive Ahmad Zulqarnain Onn says when the idea of the Merdeka 118 tower was conceived, environmental considerations were a top priority. To that end, the tower will be the first in Malaysia to work towards triple green platinum ratings with international sustainability certifications, namely Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), Green Real Estate (GreenRE) and Green Building Index (GBI).

For PNB, however, it is not just a case of achieving the ratings and certifications, but also practising this daily at work. "For example, encouraging all our colleagues to reduce paper waste and to recycle waste within each floor. Also, the glass panels, which offers 360° views, allow us to use natural light on all floors, thus reducing energy consumption. Furthermore, the tower's office floors are designed with air conditioning flowing from underneath the floors, allowing the air to disperse better and boost energy efficiency. These efforts are small steps but if we implement them in our daily lives at work, they can contribute to creating a greater impact that redefines sustainable living at the workplace," he says.

In terms of energy efficiency, Merdeka 118 will include energy saving features in its building design. These include zoned daylight sensors, tenant sub-metering, automatic blind control at key corners of the offices, low emissivity glass and centralised district cooling with on-site chilled water energy storage.

"The happiness and well-being of our occupants

and wood. "Furthermore, 95% of our construction waste will be sent to recycling centres where they will be separated and repurposed," says Ahmad Zulqarnain.

In addition, the tower will employ the Air-Conditioning and Mechanical Ventilation (ACMV) system. Compared with conventional systems, the ACMV system contributes significantly to lowering energy consumption through a water treatment system that provides water savings and reduces maintenance costs.

"We are exploring the possibility of integrating Building Information Modelling (BIM) technology with Building Management System. For the construction of the tower, we have utilised BIM extensively for clash detection between the architectural, structural, mechanical and electrical elements digitally.

"This has allowed the project team to ensure that all components are fully coordinated prior to installation, significantly reducing field issues and rework on site. Additionally, once the project is completed, integrating BIM with Building Management System will provide a visual representation of the tower for the purpose of managing and maintaining the development," Ahmad Zulqarnain explains.

With technology changing over time, he says, Merdeka 118's sustainability journey will be an evolving one, improving over time. "As part of the future maintenance expenditure, we will continue to explore further opportunities to implement similar strategies across the remaining phases of the Merdeka 118 development."



Visitors at the observation deck will have spectacular 360° views of the KL skyline

AT ONE WITH THE COMMUNITY

More than a landmark address, Merdeka 118 is sensitive to the significance of its location, the surrounding neighbourhood and the community that calls it home

When Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB) embarked on Merdeka 118, one of the key considerations was for the development to be integrated seamlessly with the wider community. The site of the landmark building within the locale of an area steeped in history, the rejuvenation of Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara, and the incorporation of these historic buildings into the Merdeka 118 precinct, speak volumes of PNB's intent.

PNB president and group chief executive Ahmad Zulqarnain Onn says although Merdeka 118 will be the city's new landmark destination, it is not meant to be just an exclusive enclave. "It's meant to be shared with the public. We already have existing assets here and we want to make these civic, public spaces available to the public.

"Much thought has been put into the experience of tenants, residents and visitors. We are a new resident of an existing neighbourhood and we want to make sure we respect what the neighbourhood stands for. We want to help propagate and prolong the tone and culture of the surrounding neighbourhood."

One way of doing so is by leveraging Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara to drive more people to the neighbourhood. In addition to Chin Woo Stadium, the Olympic Council Malaysia, Victoria Institution's rugby association and the Malaysian Basketball Association are also within the vicinity. "Hence, a sports community can also be brought together through shared activities and venues to foster closer ties with Merdeka 118," he says.

PNB group chairman Tan Sri Dr. Zeti Aziz discloses that PNB is exploring the possibility of installing a running track in Stadium Merdeka to allow people to use it during the day. "The stadium used to have a running track, but it was not there originally, so we had to remove it in order to restore the stadium back to its original state."

Replete with history and character

Apart from being home to historical sporting venues, some of Merdeka 118's neighbours that make up the address' historical and cultural fabric are the creative hub that is the Zhongshan Building in Kg Attap, says Ahmad Zulqarnain. "The Young Women's Christian Association has been in this area for 106 years and is still thriving, as well as the Sri Mahamariamman Temple that has been standing and serving devotees from our community for the last 148 years.

"Immediately at the foot of the tower, close to Jalan Balai Polis, is the gentrified part of Chinatown with many re-adapted pre-war shophouses now transformed into buzzy cafés, restaurants and dining options. There is also a little road with a picturesque alleyway called 'Kwai Chai Hong' — reflecting the vibrancy of Chinatown."

He points out that as early as 2016, when Merdeka 118 broke ground, these new developments were already beginning to emerge. "These efforts have slowly brought some fresh focus to this old part of KL. Organically, the existing area itself has undergone a transformation and I am happy to say that it is for the better."

For PNB, he adds, having that integration with the community — Chinatown in particular — is important because of its proximity to Central Market, River of Life as well as Masjid Jamek and Dataran Merdeka, all of which are already tourist attractions in their own right.

The plan ahead is to embark on community-based initiatives that will integrate Merdeka 118 with its surrounding community, says Ahmad Zulqarnain. "These include plans to improve strategic public realm areas that will be beneficial for the community. For example, improving the main walkways surrounding our precinct that connect us physically with the community, creating shelter where needed, as well as planting more trees to create more shade so it becomes safe, walkable and easily accessible. We are planning activities to ensure Malaysians and

visitors alike keep coming back to the Merdeka 118 precinct, not just during the work week but in the evenings and weekends too.

"We are a new resident of this existing community that is rich in history and culture and we need to make sure that when we are open for business, our pull factor will be shared with the community at large as well. It could be an attraction — not necessarily our attraction — but we will ensure the curation of activities not just at our site but also within the neighbourhood, where people can walk back and forth safely, ultimately attracting more people to come into the area."

Zeti says PNB will be undertaking programmes for small businesses in the area as well. "We are going to have a retail mall, and we do not want it to adversely affect small businesses in the area. So, we will work with them so that the whole area becomes vibrant."

This year, PNB will start a grants programme that will assist local businesses, particularly those that make up the existing fabric of the Merdeka 118 community. "To stimulate integration, we are looking at ways to collaborate in a targeted effort to support existing traditional and new trades with restoration works, space activation ideas and events," she says.

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is also well supported by two LRT stations (Hang Tuah and Plaza Rakyat), the MRT with the already-operational Merdeka Station and by monorail with the Maharajalela station," he says.

Other infrastructure boosts include a direct connection leading from Jalan Istana to the basement of the development, pedestrian access linked to the Bukit Bintang City Centre development, and an 800m new flyover. In all, PNB has invested almost RM500 million on infrastructure upgrades to ease accessibility.

In addition, Ahmad Zulqarnain notes that PNB is cognisant of the importance of incorporating urban greening plans in a bustling city like KL. "One definite way to do this is to plant more trees to provide more shaded walkways around the area," he says, adding that plans to further green the area are already in the works.

The finish line

Although the Movement Control Order to stem the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed the progress of the project's construction, Ahmad Zulqarnain says work resumed in mid-May last year and the tower's concrete core structure reached its peak at Level 118 in August. As at mid-January this year, the floor slab is at Level 116, whereas the glass façade is at Level 95. "In terms of milestones, we are excited to announce that the Merdeka 118 tower will be 'topping out' soon, meaning the tower will have reached the final roof slab at its peak level of 118.

"Later in the year, we are expecting the installation of the spire, which is the final piece to this very tall structure. We are also targeting the tower for completion by the first quarter of 2022," he says.

For Zeti, undertaking a project of such magnitude is like running a marathon. "For Merdeka 118, we are already seeing the finish line and very soon, we will be able to sign off. I always look forward to the sign-off of a project. All the teams that have been working on different aspects of the development at PNB, including the external consultants, have worked really hard to be able to deliver something as distinctive as Merdeka 118, which will attain global status and recognition for its many aspects, which makes it all very exciting."

What is Merdeka 118?

Merdeka 118 – A 118-storey office tower

Park Hyatt KL – Occupies the top 17 floors of the tower

The View at 118 – The highest observation deck in Southeast Asia

118 Mall – About one million sq ft of retail space

Merdeka Boulevard at 118 – A four-acre linear park with open public spaces

Look at 118 – A café with Instagrammable views

Textile Gallery – A showcase of Malay-world textile

Merdeka Residences – Three premium residential towers that will be launched in 2022, with 800 apartments, including serviced residences

Childcare centre – Purpose-built for children below seven years old

Masjid Merdeka – For a capacity of up to 3,000 people

