



# Creating a utopia for wellness

In line with the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Industry Blueprint 2021-2025, one healthcare developer is taking the creation of a wellness city that is a cut above and beyond the expected.

> See pages 2, 8 & 9



The people behind KL Wellness City - (front, from left) hospitality director Datin Karen Pua, managing director Datuk Dr Colin Lee, branding, sales and marketing executive director Datuk Seri Dr Vincent Tiew, retailing, consumerism and construction director Datuk Seri Garry Chua, (back, from left) corporate affairs and hospital services director Francis Lim, nursing director Irene Quah and project development director Wan Zamri Wan Hassan.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE



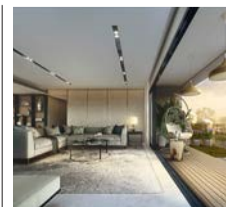
### FEATURED DEVELOPMENT

The birth of a wellness eden  
> 2



### FEATURED DEVELOPMENT

Residensi Aurora - a home like no other  
> 6



### FEATURED DEVELOPMENT

Come home to a place of tranquillity and wellness  
> 10

# The birth of a wellness eden

A holistic approach to the creation of a true wellness real estate



KL Wellness City is designed with a holistic viewpoint, said Lee.

**W**ELLNESS real estate is an emerging industry that recognises today's immense health challenges. It represents a shift that explicitly puts people's wellness at the centre of the conception, design, creation and redevelopment of homes and neighbourhoods.

Despite the growing need and demand for wellness real estate, to date there is no comprehensive development that takes a holistic approach to the creation of such a township - that is until the advent of KL Wellness City.

And as the concept of KL Wellness City aligns with Malaysia's position as the leading global destination of choice for healthcare tourists and the goals of the Malaysian Healthcare Travel Industry Blueprint 2021-2025 to elevate medical tourism in the country, this RM11bil township has already all the signs of a winning development.

"Malaysia's medical care is among the best in Southeast Asia and has gained the reputation of being one of the most preferred medical tourism destinations in the region as healthcare services in Malaysia are competitively affordable and of high standards.

## Price advantage

"Compared to Singapore, Malaysia's medical cost is 75% more affordable for the same treatment and about 50% of the doctors are from Malaysia, while we are 10% more affordable than Thailand," said KL Wellness City managing director Datuk Dr Colin Lee.

Spanning over 26 acres, the township's future-centric outlook is reflected in its sustainability credentials, which are enhanced through careful planning and management to address social, environmental and economic impacts.

Targeted to be completed in 10 years,

KL Wellness City will redefine the way Malaysians and international patients receive treatment, in a sustainable township complemented by a full suite of offerings across the health, medical, fitness and wellness pillars, said Lee.

Designed to integrate medical care with general healthcare, preventive care and fitness, he said the township was carefully planned for all occupants to be able to live a healthy and balanced lifestyle, combining the built environment with nature, green spaces, convenience, safety, and opportunities to cultivate good and healthy habits.

Built to the specifications of GBI certification guidelines, KL Wellness City's long term green credentials are further supported by Building Information Modelling up to the highest level of asset management, to enjoy a high level of operational efficiency during construction and long-term operation.

"KL Wellness City is a comprehensive, fully integrated and interconnected ecosystem that blends medical care, healthcare, wellness and fitness into a purpose-built hub, touted as the first in Southeast Asia.

"I believe that in the spirit of health and wellness, and beyond that, fitness, if people can come to a place where not only their healthcare and medical needs are treated but they can be rejuvenated, where their wellness and health is maximised, they can come to a place and stay for a short programme, for a week or a month. For instance, they can come here as a 60-year-old, and leave feeling like 45," said Lee.

Putting the health, medical, fitness and wellness pillars together, this city is made possible thanks to the accumulated experience of KL Wellness City's capable team.

"As the first healthcare and wellness city in Southeast Asia, KL Wellness City is set to offer an impeccable experience

for everyone seeking a more efficient and pleasant patient journey through its 360-degree ecosystem," said Lee.

Throughout KL Wellness City, the integrated township has been carefully planned for all occupants to be able to live a healthy and balanced lifestyle combining the built environment with nature, green spaces, convenience, safety and opportunities to cultivate good and healthy habits, he said.

## Unique opportunity

"Our wellness suites are designed to cater to growing demand, creating a new and unique opportunity for owner's occupancy, step-down care, healthcare traveller accommodation or even short-term stay.

"With comprehensive commercial and retail infrastructure and amenities, the building design maximises natural light and ventilation along with an abundance of green landscaping - offering a high occupant-to-nature ratio with as much as three to four square metres of greenery per household," he said.

### ABOVE

Phase 1 will include The Nobel Healthcare Park and the International Tertiary Hospital.

### BELOW

Retail infrastructure and amenities are located on the ground level to provide convenience.

"We all know—personally, intuitively, and from reports from analysts and researchers—that the pandemic completely transformed the concept, function and value of the home. It became our everything and during this long crisis, more people have questioned where and how they want to live, what they want in a home and community and the answer, in a word, is more wellness," Lee added.

In a nutshell, people wanted more safety, more nature and greater sustainability with space and serenity to work, and more purpose, meaning and true community, he said.

But there is more to KL Wellness City as a forward-thinking establishment. The unseen portions include attracting the various medical experts to be a part of the fledgling city not just to offer treatments but to be a centre of research and development as well.

Lee pointed out that there were many Malaysians in the medical line who have made a name for themselves, but in other countries where they were given the opportunities to grow and branch out into the areas they excelled in.

"Why can't this be offered here?" he asked. KL Wellness City will also serve as an incubation where medical breakthroughs can be nurtured, and thereby reduce the nation's brain drain where the medical industry is concerned.

"KL Wellness City is taking great efforts to provide the platform to incentivise R&D and clinical studies and with that, to attract Malaysia's talent pool to return," said Lee. 📍





**KL WELLNESS CITY**

*Wellness Redefined*



Artist impression

In the heart of the bustling Bukit Jalil, now lies The Nobel Healthcare Park, the first-of-its-kind medical and wellness hub, which is set to reinvent the way medical professionals operate and manage their practices, and just as importantly, how those in need of care receive treatment.

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# Matrix Concepts forays into healthcare

Giving a helping hand while gaining experience

**M**ATRIX Concepts, in coming to the aid of a financially distressed medical centre, made its first foray into the healthcare industry by taking on the non-clinical operations which oversee the financial, resource management and administrative work of Mawar Medical Centre (MMC) in 2019.

The property developer, which has been supporting non-profit medical organisations in the Negeri Sembilan state, signed a 30-year exclusive management contract with MMC to ensure that it will be able to provide competitive and top-quality healthcare services to the public.

"MMC under Matrix Concepts aims to be a top healthcare provider in the country. Our midterm strategy is to strengthen and expand the existing facilities and specialities to include oncology, neurology, regenerative medicine and even a Traditional Chinese Medicine division. Beds will increase from 48 to a total of 90 once the expansion is completed in the future.

"Healthcare fees will continue to be affordable in MMC. The objective is to make certain that the public can have easy access to top quality healthcare which is reasonable," said MMC chief executive officer Dr Ong Chiew Ping.

MMC currently provides subsidised dialysis services, supporting over 150 dialysis patients



Mawar Medical Centre.

within its focused welfare programme for the less fortunate and underprivileged.

With the move, Matrix Concepts will gain invaluable insight and skills in the healthcare sector through its 30-year operation in MMC. This would aid Matrix Concepts in their future endeavours in creating a diverse and sustainable property development that has all

the necessities, including healthcare, nearby. In line with Malaysia's efforts in expanding its healthcare travel sector, MMC is also looking at wellness real estate ventures in the near future.

As one of Malaysia's leading property developers, Matrix Concepts has ventured into the construction, education and hospitality



Top-quality healthcare for the public.

sectors. In the education sector is Matrix Global Schools, Matrix Concepts' award-winning international school, catering for private students from preschool to secondary education. It is placed strategically within Matrix Concepts' self-sustaining township of Bandar Sri Sendayan.

Both d'Tempat Country Club and d'Sora Boutique Business Hotel, are Matrix Concepts' hospitality ventures. The former is a top-notch club for leisure, sporting and dining facilities. The clubhouse is also a sought after venture for various functions. The latter is a business hotel that offers comfortable and complete facilities for any traveller. 📍

## Ready, set, vote with StarProperty Awards 2022 virtual showcase

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**W**ITH the unveiling of the StarProperty Awards 2022 properties participating in the virtual showcase, StarProperty invites homebuyers and industry professionals to preview some of the best developments the real estate industry has to offer.

From June 15 to July 14, homebuyers will be guided through a wide selection of discerning developmental projects for their viewing, all from the comfort of their own home, and vote for their top pick.

The virtual showcase has an impressive lineup comprising developers that are vying for their respective categories in the StarProperty Awards 2022, including names such as Boustead Properties, Gamuda Land, GuocoLand, Horizon Hills Development, IJM Land, IOI Properties Group, JKG Land, Lagenda Properties, LBS Bina Holdings, Mah Sing Group, Matrix Concepts Holdings, and MCT.

More developers include OSK Property, Paramount Property, Parkland Avenue, Platinum Victory Holdings, Posh Homes, Sime Darby Property, Sri Pengkalan Binaan, Sunsuria, Sunway Property, UDA Holdings and UEM Sunrise.

Every display is an exciting opportunity with this showcase, where participants are automatically eligible in our Visit & Win lucky draw. Stand a chance to win prizes

worth up to RM4,000 by collecting tokens through completing activities, such as visiting booths, viewing the virtual reality galleries, downloading brochures, watching webinars and many more.

With these tokens, visitors can go to the Visit & Win page to spin the wheel, putting themselves in the running to win eWallet credit worth RM20 by answering a simple question. This year's virtual showcase is proudly sponsored by our exclusive tile partner Guocera.

StarProperty is also organising a host of webinars that provide insight into the property industry, expert opinions and advice for first-time homebuyers. Learn as you shop with webinars such as Common Mistakes of Property Investment, MRT 3: Lord of the Rings, Should You Buy Your First Home During the Post Pandemic, 7 Legal Tips For Auction Properties, and more.

Lastly, get your voting fingers ready and give us your say on the StarProperty Awards 2022 Readers' Choice for Best Architectural, Most Heart Warming, and Most Preferred. Participants will be able to view first-hand the list of developers who truly deserve their votes.

Do not miss out on other opportunities from StarProperty. There will be fairs happening throughout the year at your favourite locations including Central I-City, Sunway Pyramid, Sunway Velocity, IOI Mall Puchong and Mid Valley Exhibition Centre, each with their own exclusive promotions to look out for.

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# How will the property industry react to wellness tourism?

Stakeholders say their piece

By HO JIA WEN [jiawen.ho@thestar.com.my](mailto:jiawen.ho@thestar.com.my)

LAST November, the Malaysian Healthcare Travel Industry Blueprint 2021-2025 was launched to make healthcare travel the nation's key export by 2025. Healthcare travel or medical tourism is when foreigners come to Malaysia for healthcare that is unavailable in their home country or for more affordable healthcare. Having one of the most advanced medical sectors in the Asia Pacific region, Malaysia has been attracting many foreigners via medical tourism.

According to Far Capital chief executive officer Faizul Ridzuan, the blueprint is advantageous for Malaysia, as healthcare travel is a niche market that Malaysia is capable of targeting and expanding. It would also highlight Malaysia as a sought after retirement destination, and the income generated will be significantly higher.

Both Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) acting president Datuk NK Tong and Pejuang Hartanah founder Ahyat Ishak see the blueprint as advantageous for the property industry.

"Covid has really hindered the property industry, and anything that would contribute to the property industry and create that demand is very welcomed," said Ahyat.

"Though the property industry may not be directly or immediately impacted by the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Industry Blueprint, it is an effort to open up and make Malaysia an attractive destination and may have a long-term positive impact on real estate," said Tong.

As the blueprint would attract more healthcare travellers, demand for short-term stays could increase. Accommodation is not only for the healthcare travellers alone but also for their families and friends who have come to provide emotional and physical support.

"More investors and property owners would be looking for properties to meet the increased demand by the healthcare travellers, especially those that are near the hospital or medical centre," said Global Link Properties managing director Vincent Tan.

"Convenient medical facilities will add more value to the property compared to pure residential areas, and will make the entire development more holistic, instead of haphazard additions of amenities," said Forward Realty group chief executive officer Tee Soon Joo.

There is a trend of developers integrating healthcare into their master plan. Not only these properties are catered for healthcare tourism but also to the elderly Malaysian demographic.



"In the next few years, these properties will be well received as more people are entering retirement age and more significance is placed on wellness since the pandemic," said Faizul.

"Many working individuals have elderly parents staying with them and more buyers will be looking for developments with healthcare amenities for peace of mind, and easier access," said Tee.

A vibrant healthcare travel industry can also bring many opportunities for the Malaysian property industry. More visitors would increase tourism and interest to invest in Malaysia.

"Typically, those travelling into Malaysia for healthcare services may stay for longer periods, and in doing so, discover the attraction of Malaysia as a place to live and invest," said Tong.

"Besides getting healthcare, they would want to visit Malaysia. Property developers can have tourism-focused packages, and maybe work with wellness centres for the healthcare travellers that come in," said Tee.

In addition to tourism, developers can also tap into the technology industry through smart homes, as more people are going online for everyday necessities. A smart home that allows residents to remotely control their home, would be an attraction to buyers. Tan anticipates more demand for smart homes going forward.

"Many smart homes have CCTV or security monitoring systems that can be controlled remotely via WIFI. This can be attractive for foreigners who only live periodically in their purchased homes in Malaysia. When they are back in their home country they can still monitor their units," said Tee.

However, Tan thinks that rather than entering the healthcare industry directly, developers are more likely to indirectly contribute. They would continue developing housing projects that property owners would rent out as temporary accommodation for healthcare travellers.

"Developers still seem to be more inclined towards residential or commercial development projects, instead of entering into the healthcare industry. Mostly, it is because developers perceive lesser risk and these developments have a better chance of obtaining funding from banks," said Tan.

Looking through the investors' lens, both Faizul and Ahyat believed that investors would be interested in properties that have healthcare elements. The future is bright with the government propelling healthcare travel through the blueprint and the increasing trend in

healthcare property.

"I think investors who are aware of the potential of medical tourism will be highly keen to look at products with such a niche," said Faizul.

"If the developers show that they are active in the healthcare travel industry and present the industry's potential through facts. I think investors will come in. Personally, I would consider investing as well," said Ahyat.



"Medical facilities will add more value to the property compared to pure residential areas," said Tee.

However, for both investors, the oversupply of property is a concern, as there has been a considerable number of unsold properties. "Demand needs to be created for the property industry. The Malaysia Healthcare travel blueprint would create a specific demand, which a global population is willing to pay," added Ahyat.



"Healthcare travellers would discover the attraction of Malaysia as a place to live," said Tong.



"The blueprint would create a specific demand," said Ahyat.



"Developers are more likely to indirectly contribute to the healthcare travel industry," said Tan.

# Residensi Aurora - a home like no other

The ultimate home for your family to flourish and thrive



Large front porch for ample parking space.

**F**INDING an ideal family home can be a chore and confusing especially when there are 101 things to consider ranging from essential needs to ease of convenience. With the luxurious Residensi Aurora by dependable Selangor State Development Corporation (PKNS), this gem, nestled in Malaysia's technology hub Cyberjaya, fits everything in the right slots.

Designed with ample space for work and play, it is the perfect place to foster physical and mental wellness for you and your family. As a renowned and trusted developer with a good track record of building developments of a high calibre, PKNS's Residensi Aurora forms a part of the exciting launches in the Selangor Cyber Valley.

With a total gross development value of RM420mil, the low-density residential property houses only 300 units of terrace units over 30 acres of land. This provides for spacious and serene living, all within a small and tight-knitted community that Residensi Aurora is master-planned as.

## Spacious design

Designed for luxurious and comfortable living, Residensi Aurora comprises double and triple-storey terrace houses. Both types of units have spacious built-ups ranging from 2,227 sq ft to 3,796 sq ft.

These exquisite units exude a modern flair to encapsulate the chic and elegant lifestyle. The interior has a spacious open layout, becoming the perfect space for quality family time, whether during family mealtime or an evening of fun. The open planned design also gives you the space and flexibility to craft your dream home without carrying out major renovations. As an additional perk, triple storey units have a balcony, which is perfect for watching the sunset or enjoying the breeze.

During the day, natural light would pour in from the stylish floor to ceiling glass windows, brightening the home, and saving you from unnecessary electricity expenses. The property also has natural ventilation, constantly ensuring the air at home is cool and clean. You will no longer have to bear the hot and humid tropical weather.

Harmonious shared living is



**ABOVE**  
Spacious Residensi Aurora 3-storey terrace house.

made better as each bedroom has a bathroom of its own. The units come with 5 bedrooms and 5 bathrooms, or 6 bedrooms and 6 bathrooms. The tasteful and spacious design is perfect for balanced family life, and can comfortably accommodate large multigenerational families.

## A smart home

Situated in a tech city, Residensi Aurora is a smart development. Not only Residensi Aurora is gated and guarded, every home is equipped with smart features for added security. The smart home system comes with CCTVs that would alert nearby police or fire stations. The CCTVs can be easily monitored with a simple click of a mobile app. Other smart features like a security keypad for the main door, a panic button and motion sensors are installed to further safeguard your family. Helping you flourish in physical and mental wellness with your loved ones in a safe space.

Residensi Aurora is sited in a strategic location, with easy access to

highways, malls, and other amenities. The closest city is Putrajaya which is only 12 kilometres away, and KLIA 26 kilometres away. Commuting to different parts of the Klang Valley from Residensi Aurora is effortless with the Elite and MEX Highway, and they further connect to other major highways like the North-South Expressway and the Federal Highway. Public transport is readily available by bus and KLIA Express in Putrajaya Sentral, which is only a short drive away. There will be more public transport options with the upcoming MRT stations in Cyberjaya on the Putrajaya Line.

Your family's health care is of utmost importance. The nearest healthcare facility, Putrajaya Hospital, is only 12 kilometres away. Healthcare facilities will be brought even closer upon the completion of Cyberjaya Hospital, which is 1.5km away.

High-quality education is the concern of many parents. They can be at ease with the wide variety of school options, from primary all the way to tertiary education. There are three international schools, including ELC International school and Brainy Bunch International school. A total of seven universities

are in proximity to Residensi Aurora, some reputable universities include Multimedia University, MAHSA University and Limkokwing University of Creative Technology.

Travelling far is unnecessary for entertainment. You can spend quality time with your loved ones in nearby shopping malls like DPulze, and Centrus Malls. There are also parks, like Cyberjaya Lake Gardens, where you can have a picnic on a relaxed weekend.

Although property prices are constantly rising, the leasehold Residensi Aurora remains reasonably priced from RM950,000 to RM1,537,000 considering the size of the units. PKNS offers an exclusive package for prospective buyers, first-come-first-served. There will be discounts on the unit prices. Also, there are no charges for the sales and purchase agreement (SPA) and the memorandum of transfer (MOT). Other documentation incentives up to RM20,000 and smart home features worth up to RM15,000 will also be complementary. The houses are ready for buyers to move in as the Certificate of Completion and Compliance has been issued. More information is obtainable at 03-5022 0187. 📞

**BELOW**  
Artist impression of the 2-storey terrace house.



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# The wellness real estate wave has arrived

Developers adding more health components to their developments

By JOSEPH WONG josephwong@thestar.com.my

**M**ALAYSIA'S health and wellness industry has always been a bright shining star when it comes to drawing international tourists into the nation, adding hefty earnings to the country's economy.

Malaysia's medical tourism sector generated RM1.7bil in revenue from 1.22 million healthcare travellers in 2019, said KL Wellness City managing director Datuk Dr Colin Lee, pointing out that the industry has the potential to contribute up to RM7bil to the economy by 2025.

Considering the multiplier effect on the industries linked to medical tourism, the revenue to be gained is enormous. While the last two years were hampered by the closed borders due to the Covid-19 outbreak, there is no denying that health and wellness have gained greater interest, in the wake of the pandemic. The demand a wellness-related properties has shifted to a higher level as there is now a greater awareness of health precautionary measures.

And this is good news going forward as Malaysia has a pricing advantage. Compared to Singapore, Malaysia's medical cost is 75% more affordable for the same treatment and about 50% of the doctors are from Malaysia. In addition, the nation is 10% more affordable than Thailand, said Lee.

For developers who have not yet awakened to the revelation, the lesson here is that this tourism driver also leaves an indelible mark on the property industry, as both industries have close ties with each other.

But it must be stated that whichever development that aims to tap into this wellness real estate must be adaptable and responsive to the local context, said Lee.

"New wellness communities are not formulaic or measured by a checklist that must be followed rigorously. They are guided and inspired by, a set of key elements that improve people's lives in the relevant context and at the right levels for each unique community.

"What makes life better in one place doesn't necessarily mean living better somewhere else. Wellness communities respond to the local context with solutions that have the greatest and longest-lasting impact.

"Our medical, wellness, business and retail components in KL Wellness City are designed efficiently with Green Building Index (GBI) and Building Information Modelling (BIM 6D) to manage the finest details and quality proficiently from the start of the construction stage until the operation of the buildings. Thus, reducing the possibility of any additional or unnecessary fees once the buildings are in operation," said Lee.

## Keeping maintenance costs low

One worry is that the incorporation of all the designs, technology and facilities into such a development will inherently increase the cost of maintenance but Lee pointed out that this may not be the case as technology like BIM can be used in place to keep the cost down.

"We can use the system to monitor the maintenance so that the facilities are well kept,



rather than risking them to break down which would cost more to replace. Then the building will be better maintained and well kept. The whole community plays a positive role in the upkeep and the use of technology enhances the efficiency controls," he said.

Moreover, with Malaysia's ageing population to hit 5.6 million by 2035, there are spin-offs to be made when tapping into local wellness tourism. Certainly, there is a bright future for residential developments if they follow the universal trend, catering to an increasingly ageing population.

But what is even more interesting is that a substantial number who are also into wellness real estate is the younger generation, who have embraced a healthier living lifestyle.

"Healthcare is a very specialised industry and some developers are already participating in this sector. Other developers may consider entering this market, perhaps through strategic tie-ups with healthcare providers," said Real Estate and Housing Developers Association (Rehda) acting president Datuk NK Tong.

He added that the blueprint is a very healthy development as Malaysia continues to open up in line with the post-pandemic recovery.

While many developers in Greater Kuala Lumpur, especially those undertaking township projects, are tying in with wellness centres, up until recently, none has considered venturing

into a development as holistic as KL Wellness City.

Most of the bigger and more reputable developers have made health and wellness a component of their townships, looking into providing a variety of facilities and amenities alongside placemaking attractions to build their respective communities.

In contrast, KL Wellness City zooms directly

into all aspects that are medical in relation, making it unique among other developments.

But whether it is on a large scale or a part of townships, it is undeniable that well real estate is a wave of the future. Among those who have jumped onto the wellness bandwagon include Mah Sing Group Bhd (Mah Sing), Eco World Development Group Bhd (EcoWorld) and Sunway Property.

**BELOW**  
Traditional medicine is largely ignored by modern medicine practices but it should not be discounted.



To lure back Malaysian medical experts, there must be opportunities to attract them.

For Mah Sing, their Southville City project in Bangi includes a wellness centre. EcoWorld's Parque Residences in Eco Sanctuary, Kota Kemuning has a wellness component attached to it. Sunway Property rides on the group's wider core businesses which include the medical sector as Sunway runs its own hospital.

Even outside of Greater KL and in East Malaysia, developers have been dipping into the wellness real estate waters. For example, in Melaka, Hatten Land Ltd's wellness-themed mixed development Satori, which in Japanese means enlightenment, is among the first in the former Portuguese colony.

In Perak, GreenAcres, located in Bandar Meru Raya, Ipoh caters to independent and mobile seniors. Even Johor's Iskandar Puteri's multiple wellness-residential developments and Penang's RM25bil Wellness City of Dreams has different wellness concepts. Across the South China Sea in Kuching, Sarawak, there is the Eden-on-the-Park, yet another wellness-related development targeted at the older generation.

## Ageing population

The percentage of the population aged 65 years and over increased from 6.7% in 2019 to 7% in 2020, according to the Department of Statistics. Malaysia anticipates an ageing population of 5.6 million by 2035. According to the report, this translates to 15% of the population being classified as senior citizens.

According to the World Health Organization, an ageing population is caused by a decline in fertility rates and/or rising life expectancy, and with at least 7% of its population aged 65 and older, whereas an aged nation has 14% or more in that age group.

"Malaysians' life expectancy has risen over 20 years since 1957, and the average life expectancy of an average Malaysian at birth now stands at 74.9 years of age," it says.

The department also projected that the number will increase to 9.6 million, or 23.6% of the population by 2050. Despite this, the number of developers who have projects providing quality care to seniors is limited to a few.

Age-wise, the market is now ready for these types of developments, as the baby-boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, are nearing the retirement age or have retired.

"Leveraging Malaysia's leading position in healthcare tourism to not only boost the industry's contribution to the economy but also to attract Malaysians practising various specialities and subspecialists to return to serve their country.

"The majority of healthcare professionals would not consider coming back to practice as not only our ringgit is low but they find no opportunities to pursue what they are doing now overseas, especially in R&D (research and development)," said Lee.

**"For developers who have not yet awakened to the revelation, the lesson here is that this tourism driver also leaves an indelible mark on the property industry, as both industries have close ties with each other."**

—Datuk Dr Colin Lee



Wellness real estate takes into consideration amenities like wheelchair accessibility, rest stations for the elderly and walkability.

## Design matters

As expected, each and every developer's concept of a mixed wellness and residential development varies. However, every party involved are on the same page where designing a development with healthcare aspects is concerned.

According to KL Wellness City managing director Datuk Dr Colin Lee, in alignment with wellness real estate, consideration of the following when planning the township would involve three main aspects.

### A defined purpose

Sustainable wellness communities are becoming more and more intentional from initial concept planning to purposeful activation. Healthy environments that are mindful of the environment are the new expectation for consumers and residents. These built environments are being proactively envisioned, designed and built on purpose, fueled by an intentional wellness vision that will endure for generations. Wellness is not an afterthought. It is the primary intention of wellness communities.

"Many wellness communities are wellness only in name. Authentic wellness communities are designed on purpose from the beginning and at every stage of development with the intention of improving people's lives. This is where we design in accordance with a 360 integrated interconnected within KL Wellness City itself, such as direct linkages between building to building and its walkability from all walks of life; a wheelchair friendly environment throughout," said Lee.

### All sizes matter

Consumers are demanding wellness in their built environments. Forward-thinking developers realize the elements of the most transformational wellness communities are scalable—they work at the large scale and the smaller scale.

Wellness can function at any scale, and although solutions vary with the size of the project, the principles of wellness communities are meaningfully applied to guide the development of communities at any scale.

"KL Wellness City, sitting at 26.49 acres, is just the right size to efficiently design and curate the most ideal integrated healthcare and wellness ecosystem, situated within an international zone as well, while conveniently located in a matured neighbourhood of Bukit Jalil," said Lee.

### People first

Wellness communities are becoming truly impactful. Driven by delivering human-centric benefits that enhance the well-being of the people who engage with the community, this, in turn, increases the value and reputation of the real estate for the developer. Starting with the end users' experience and creating tangible health benefits are the keys.

"We have focused on bricks and mortar for way too long as wellness integration was too expensive. Today, too expensive has been redefined, and the true value is in the tangible, meaningful things that improve people's lives," said Lee.

While all these being said, the majority of Malaysia's current population are in a sandwich generation, where they have parents that need some form of healthcare attention and school going kids. These will grow into a real estate need that requires an environment to cater for the ageing population and to ease the working class from the unnecessary stress while they are at work. Hence, the core foundation of a health and wellness township serving a multi-generation needs to be thoughtfully planned. ☞



**F**OR many urban working individuals, the dream is to find a home that is affordable, comfortable and accessible.

This need became more prominent during and after the pandemic where many home seekers are now looking for a spacious, yet affordable home that embraces holistic living and accommodates working from home. With these considerations in mind, OSK Property marked its first presence in Puchong with the launch of Shorea Park, a nature-inspired, freehold development that is surrounded by a thriving matured township. Its first phase, MIRA at Shorea Park serviced apartments was launched late last year where it has already achieved an incredible 85% take-up rate to date.

Reflecting the ideals of tranquillity and healthy living, the overarching theme of MIRA at Shorea Park is the element of water. It has pristine water features, such as a 60-metre pool, a hydrotherapy spa and a zen-inspired water stream to induce a sense of calmness in everyday living. Towering at 31 storeys, residents have aesthetic unblocked views. MIRA at Shorea Park is an urban sanctuary that allows busy individuals to rest and recharge in a peaceful, relaxing environment after a long day.

MIRA at Shorea Park has an estimated gross development value of RM363mil, out of the total RM1.76bil of the Shorea Park masterplan development. As a freehold property, MIRA at Shorea Park occupies 4.99 acres out of the 27.77 acres of the entire masterplan. Upon completion, Shorea Park would have varied residential areas and commercial hubs, making it a vibrant place for the community with convenient access to multiple amenities.

MIRA at Shorea Park offers five practical and versatile layouts for buyers to choose from. Each unit is spacious with an open layout for comfortable living and gives flexibility for homeowners to fashion their ideal home. Comprising built-ups from 550 sq ft to 1,011 sq ft, the units come with 1+1-to-4-bedroom options, accommodating working individuals and couples as well as growing families.

Several layouts come with a wide balcony that combines indoor and outdoor spaces, incorporating nature into everyday living and improving air quality. On top of that, larger units are provided with additional parking spaces, enough for families with multiple cars. Starting with an affordable price of RM250,000, MIRA at Shorea Park is perfect for home-buyers looking to purchase their first home, one that is comfortable, safe and stylish.

## A thriving lifestyle

Nurturing a lifestyle focused on wellness, there are ample facilities for exercise and recreational activities, such as a jogging track, gymnasium, swimming pool and futsal court. Children are well-provided with many play areas, a treehouse playground, and a kindergarten. Roomy co-working spaces are available for a productive work-from-home lifestyle. Residents also have plenty of spaces to interact through activity rooms for dance, games and yoga. Moreover, carefree living is secure and protected in MIRA at Shorea Park, as it is a fully gated and guarded neighbourhood with multi-tier security.



An artist's impression of MIRA at Shorea Park's pristine water features.

# Come home to a place of tranquillity and wellness

MIRA at Shorea Park by OSK Property creates an urban sanctuary in Puchong



An artist's impression where all residents will be welcomed by the stylish Shorea Park's entrance statement surrounded by a beautiful and serene environment.

Not to mention, Shorea Park is adjacent to the flourishing and fast-growing town of Bandar Bukit Puchong, where lifestyle amenities are well established within the area. These include hypermarkets like Lotus' Extra, Aeon Big and Hero Market for fresh produce and home essentials. For window shopping or outing with friends or family, there are IOI Mall Puchong, IOI City Mall, DPULZE shopping centre, and Tamarind Square.

MIRA at Shorea Park has excellent connectivity through highways such as Damansara-Puchong Expressway (LDP), South Klang Valley Expressway (SKVE) and North-South Expressway Central Link (Elite). Shorea Park is also less than 15km away from Putrajaya and Cyberjaya. In a strategic location like Shorea Park, travelling anywhere within

and outside of the Klang Valley is very convenient.

## A rare find

Parents have a plethora of options to choose from for their children's education. There are private and public schools such as Taylor's International School, SK Pulau Meranti and SJK (C) Sin Ming, which are all nearby. Moreover, Multimedia University and Limkokwing University are easily accessible as they are just approximately 20 minutes away.

Living in MIRA at Shorea Park also ensures convenient access to medical facilities which is vital for families with young ones or the elderly. Nearby are also healthcare facilities, such as KPMC Puchong Specialist Centre, Columbia Asia Hospital and Klinik Kesihatan

## BELOW

An artist's impression of selected units that come with a wide balcony that offers extra space for families to organize activities.



Puchong Batu 14.

Made perfect with all the essentials for home buyers with its affordable pricing, facilities, location and amenities, MIRA at Shorea Park is tailor-made for the ideal home life. Those interested to know more may contact 018-311 8880, log on to <https://shoreapark.com.my> or visit the Shorea Park Sales Gallery.

Additionally, the much anticipated second phase of Shorea Park, ANYA at Shorea Park is now open for registration. Inspired by the theme of wood, it is poised for enhancing family life, with units catered specifically for multigenerational living. ANYA at Shorea Park offers dual-key concept units where different generations can live under the same roof whilst retaining privacy. There is also an extensive array of family-friendly facilities to support an active and healthy lifestyle for residents of all ages. 🏡



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Inspired by the element of water, **MIRA at Shorea Park** reflects the similar fluidity that blends seamlessly into the surrounding landscape overlooking the majestic lakes.

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**SHOREA PARK SALES GALLERY**  
Lot 13992, Jalan Meranti Permai,  
Taman Meranti Permai,  
47100 Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia

**018 311 8880**  
[shoreapark.com.my](http://shoreapark.com.my)

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# What happened to the property crowdfunding push?

Lacklustre interest in alternative financing led to its decline

By LIEW JIA YI (YANIKA)  
yanika.liew@thestar.com.my

**I**N 2018, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched FundMyHome, a property crowdfunding (PCF) platform with the goal of assisting first-time homebuyers through non-traditional home loans from banks. The launch came with a push to embrace an increasingly digital age when crowdfunding was a booming opportunity, and as with all deals that are too good to be true, terms and conditions naturally apply.

Enshrined in Budget 2019, property crowdfunding platforms were meant to function as an alternative source of financing and are regulated by the Securities Commission. The government would allocate RM50mil to set up a Co-Investment Fund (CIF) to invest alongside private investors to aid homebuyers.

The FundMyHome platform allowed clients to buy their first home and occupy it for five years with a one-time payment of 20% of the purchase price while the remaining 80% was funded by the participating financial institution. After five years, clients will be able to choose to buy the house in full or sell it.

The attraction of owning property through FundMyHome comes from the potential increase in value. Usually, property prices increase over time, so owners can take advantage of the increase in value if they decide to sell. On the other hand, owners who stay on will need to match the market price of the house.

## Initial reaction

The excitement of a new financing option kept the property industry buzzing for months. But today, the FundMyHome website is inactive and its office is temporarily closed. But it is not the only one. The handful of other crowdfunding options that emerged in 2019 also suffered a similar fate. Property crowdfunding seems to be



unsuccessful, despite the push from the government, property developers, banks and investors.

"The inherent issue with the PCF initiative is that the investors have disproportionate power over the first-time homebuyers," policy researcher Lim Chee Han said. As a founding member of Agora Society, Lim had spoken out against the initiative from the beginning.

"Their (investors) strong interest in the returns and their risk aversion may already be a bad starting point for any kind of fair deal to both parties. It is safe to assume, any gain from the property market price change is at the expense of the homebuyer, the latter has to face a larger sum to refinance after 5 years if they were to keep the property," he said.

In recent years, the issue of housing overhang has been troubling developers and real estate practitioners. Findings from the Malaysia Institute of Estate Agents' (MIEA) 2021 Property Market Report show the highest rate of overhang seen over the last five years,

with only 39.3% of new residential properties launched in 2021 sold. Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association Malaysia (Rehda) Institute's most recent Housing Forward report identified the slow release of unsold Bumiputera quota units as an issue and urged the government to buy such unsold properties.

"The housing developers may want to push sales using this PCF model, hoping to solve the overhang or unsold properties issue," Lim said. "However, those property projects which have participated are not great and appealing enough to potential first-time homebuyers, one may check the locations, type and specifications of those properties, then they will understand."

## Mismatched target audience

Another issue Lim identified was the infeasibility of encouraging the proposed target audience from participating. "Given the PCF framework

restricts the usage of PCF for only the provision to first-time homebuyers for residential properties worth RM500,000 or below, it may be targeting middle and lower-income households and new families who may face the typical issue of not getting bank loan approval. That also indicates that this group might have some financial risks.

"The requirement of 20% downpayment to secure the deal under FundMyHome is laughably naive when many of those first-time homebuyers are struggling to get even 10% for a conventional mortgage," Lim said.

Dr Chin Hon Choong, who conducted a study looking into first-time homebuyer interests in using property crowdfunding, commented that this concept may not have taken off with the public due to a few factors.

"First, homebuyers' awareness and knowledge on property crowdfunding concept and its application. As per informed by our respondents, we noticed that the majority are not aware of property crowdfunding. If they are aware, they are not able to differentiate between peer-to-peer lending and the equity-based crowdfunding concept," Chin said.

Property crowdfunding, like crowdfunding in any sector, can be done through peer-to-peer lending and equity crowdfunding. Equity crowdfunding operates like investing in a business, where investors get a share in the business as it grows. Whereas peer-to-peer lending operates much like a loan, with investors' money being given to a business with a specific amount repaid over a defined term.

## Differing interests

"Second, in relation to the mechanism, after five years, owners would need to secure financial support to secure their homeownership. Why would I want to use a platform that ultimately directs me back to the conventional housing loan? Don't forget that the house price increases over time. In order to make it attractive, then the platform may need to freeze the property value and with support from financial institutions that offer loans after 5 years.

"Third, there is a mismatch of commitment. To invest in a real estate development project, investors have three to five years of a lock-in period to put their money into the project. For a housing loan, the money may take 30-35 years long. Investors may not be so keen to lock their money in for such a long period.

"I believe the rationale of the five years for our Malaysia version of property crowdfunding is to attract investors. But this will not meet homebuyers' commitment period and thus, there is a mismatch of commitment period that ultimately make the platform unattractive," Chin added.



"The inherent issue with the PCF initiative is that the investors have disproportionate power over the first-time homebuyers," Lim said.



"Accommodation is one of the basic needs, perhaps a human right," Chin said.

## Where do we go from here?

While the concept of property crowdfunding seems to have been shelved for the moment, both Lim Chee Han and Dr Chin Hon Choong agree that the model as a whole has the potential to provide financial aid to homebuyers. Property crowdfunding can be used in a way that is sustainable and protects homeowners first, but the core issue of homeownership in Malaysia has to be addressed before all else.

"Personally, I am very interested with the application of property crowdfunding in facilitating homeownership. Nevertheless, there are shortages that we should address before it can be widely accepted by the

homebuyers. Accommodation is one of the basic needs, perhaps a human right," Chin said, echoing the United Nation's right to adequate housing, wherein housing is recognised as a human right, not a commodity.

"Thus, it is very important that a trustworthy platform that is perceived to protect all interested parties is being created for the purpose of fostering homeownership," Chin added.

Lim added that the core issue is the housing price inflation into the region of severe unaffordability in ownership, while people's wages and salaries are still growing

painfully slow and could not keep up with the housing prices.

"Property prices are on the upward trend but at the same time, the bank loan approval rate for residential properties still stays low. In 2021, the bank loan approval rate was 34.9%, similar to 2020. Therefore PCF as a financing option may not address these root problems," he said.

With the privilege of hindsight, the property crowdfunding push is an interesting case study to explore alternative financing options. But perhaps it's time to look at possible solutions to the core issues that lead to Malaysia's lack of homeownership, such as increasing wages, streamlining the bank loan approval process, and ensuring the quality and accessibility to homes that claim to be affordable. ↗

## Circumventing the challenges to stand out among the masses

Contributed by **SULAIMAN SAHEH**

**B**EING in a market environment that is seemingly oversupplied, there is the challenge and struggle to have your property stand out amongst the masses, be it in classified advertisements or online portal postings.

While the old age mantra of location, location, location maintains its relevance, other considerations and factors are added to the picture when wanting to put your property an extra mile ahead to attract the best buyer or tenant – being the best not only to those who offer the best price but also to suitably match your type of property.

For the residential market, when facing a situation whereby there are more than 63,000 units of completed and ready to be occupied new homes as well as pre-owned homes looking to be sold, it takes careful planning and a creative strategy to make the sale. As the unsold situation – more commonly known as overhang which refers to unsold home units that have already been completed and ready to be occupied – is already a prevailing issue pre-pandemic, the economic crisis and financial insecurities brought about by Covid-19 for nearly two years have only added more complexity to the overhang situation.

For the commercial sector, retail and office spaces are also facing tight competition as space relevancy has taken a twist with new norms being established post-pandemic and newer buildings coming into the scene with the next latest technology and design.

### Easiest eye-puller

To know your best mark is to know your product in both its benefits and flaws. Different types and categories of design attract and meet the need of their respective group of buyers. Low prices may be the easiest eye-puller, but some prefer the addition of specific features or maintenance of a certain quality at a higher price mark. It is also worth knowing what platform would serve you best when marketing your property, be it for sale or rent.

Have a feel of what the majority type of units are listed on the property listing websites and compare where yours would be best suited. Not only will you be seen by the right pool of buyers, but having your property be listed alongside others of similar calibre will lend a hand to your property staying relevant.

With the best platform identified and the market pool targeted, putting on the right price tag is the next step to selling your property. Too high of a starting price may deter prospective buyers who may be of the assumption that there would be too much haggling effort required or the seller is in no rush to seal the deal – more so when there are other similar rivals available at a lower price. But starting too low may cause the seller to lose out on a higher profit margin unnecessarily.



# Hitting the right mark(et) in a post-pandemic environment

But knowing the right price tag involves more than just matching the current market price. The market price advised by a qualified valuer can be your point of reference but as to where you would settle on, lower or higher or just at that, is reliant on the property listed. Having additional features or a certain level of maintenance done can be reasons to boost up the asking price. Some buyers are more than willing to pay for the added features.

On other hand, having your property in a less desirable state may need you to pull your asking price a tad lower. This may be due to you having not the funds or time to spruce up the property but it does not mean you will lose out on the game. Just as there are buyers willing to pay more for readily-added features, there are also buyers who are less critical in their criteria and are more open to units that can be remodelled or redecorated to their specific tastes. Rather than paying a higher price to begin with, these do-it-yourself buyers would rather save what they can at the buying stage and instead put aside funds for the renovation works.

Having a price tag attached to your property has its influence and whether it be on the higher-end, lower-end or even just in the majority will convey an impression to your prospective buyers. Consulting with real estate professionals can be of great help in gaining knowledge of what is the current market price. Take time to learn what you can about the area the property is located within and what is the impression held by the public. Is it a price-sensitive area or is the appeal more on the product itself than the lowest price tag offered?

Visuals have and will never lose their relevance and significance to any buyer's eye. Oftentimes, what we see will set our first impression of the item in view. For advertisers, visuals are everything as they need to catch any random passer-by's eye instantly and hold it for a short

moment for the message intended to be delivered and understood.

Retailers looking to keep casual browsers as long as possible will have the interior design and product arrangements done in a way that constantly intrigues one's interest. In property selling, both are applicable as a seller would want to pull in a prospective buyer or tenant on the first look and have them stay on to admire longer.

As mentioned before, in knowing your product in both its benefits and flaws, put emphasis on the bestselling points and be careful in handling some of the less desirable aspects of the property. There is some weight to being realistically optimistic as buyers may appreciate a seller or agent who balances between uplifting the best features and being transparent on the unavoidable flaws. With the right buyer, they may be more accepting of the flaws as it may not have much impact on their occupation of the property.

### A good polish

Of course, there is no loss to giving the property a good polish and even a makeover that will likely boost up its appeal. As social media has become an integrated part of people's daily lives, having a visually attractive environment and setting gives the added bonus of inspiration and innovation to either the occupants themselves or visitors of commercial places. And it is no longer just about appearing modern and contemporary as the vintage and old-school themes are equally admired and appreciated.

One of the real estate practices done that incorporates the exploration of different visual themes on pre-existing spaces is the repurposing or reusing of old, abandoned buildings into a whole new place. Not only does the practice push new ideas and experimentations to new limits, but it is also sustainable to



Sulaiman Saheh is the director of research for global real estate consultancy Rahim & Co International Sdn Bhd.

both the environment and community as waste is minimised and history preserved.

And last but not least, is to choose the right professional. The word right refers to professionals who know the nature and pace of the real estate game and are qualified according to their respective certificates or extent of knowledge and experience in the profession. Look for individuals who are locals to the area and know the current whereabouts and rates of the market.

Misinformation can only lead to a long listing wait or losing out on your maximum profit margin because you were unaware of your property's true value in relation to its location and competition. Keep in touch on what is the latest property advice and guidance given based on the current market climate and educate yourself on the know-how of property investment.

While the advice and pointers stated have stayed relevant and of use in pre-pandemic times, the economic shake-up and financial insecurities that had occurred and suffered over the two years have added an even stronger need for property investors and owners to be on a stronger footing with their properties and be equipped with the relevant information and data when making the selling decision. 📌

**BELOW**  
Buyers have different preferences when it comes to property selection.



# Increased OPR suggests economic recovery

Malaysia's housing market unlikely to waver over interest hike

By LIEW JIA YI (YANIKA)  
yanika.liew@thestar.com.my

FOR most homebuyers, buying a home means having to take up a housing loan from a bank or financial institution. The amount of monthly installments is determined by the interest rates that they would have to pay.

So Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) recently moved to lift the Overnight Policy Rate (OPR) by 25 basis points to 2% but what does this mean for the average homebuyer?

Most importantly, homebuyers need to be aware that the OPR impacts banking institutions, which are subjected to the interest rate when lending money to other banks. Due to the nature of a bank's lending activities, such as withdrawals and loans, banks may need to borrow money from another bank to maintain their cash reserves. The rate of interest when lending to other banks is determined by BNM.

"Any increases in interest rates will have a direct, inverse impact on the property industry. We have however been enjoying a record low 1.75% OPR since the Covid pandemic and some form of increase here is anticipated," Savills Malaysia group managing director Datuk Paul Khong said.

According to Juwai IQI Group co-founder and chief executive officer Kashif Ansari, between 2004 and 2020, the OPR only dropped as low as 2%. The past two years of the pandemic represented the first time in history that the overnight policy rate has been as low as 1.75%, a fact which had been similarly expressed in BNM's statement upon the increase of the OPR. In fact, 2% is already considered low by historical standards.

## Buyer behaviour

"For homebuyers generally, the actual increase in OPR will basically equate to more money required to service the existing loans in layman terms. Either longer repayment periods on a status quo basis or a higher monthly repayment rate. Since the increase is a nominal amount of 0.25%, we will not see any major impact on house buyers who can afford to invest in property. Based on an increase in OPR (loan interest from 3.25% to 3.5% per annum), the repayment for a RM1mil loan over a 35-year period will increase from RM3,990 to RM4,130 per month," said Khong.

Malaysia Institute of Estate Agents' (MIEA) secretary-general Evon Heng said the buyer that they were servicing continued with their purchase despite the interest hike.

"They didn't cancel or stop moving because of the interest rate increase," she told StarProperty, adding that the impact of the hike would mean that the



"Any increases in interest rates will have a direct, inverse impact on the property industry," Khong said.



"As real estate practitioners, be alert of the changing in the market," Heng said.



"In Malaysia, headline inflation will likely be somewhere between 2.2% and 3.2% this year," Ansari said.



loan repayment would increase, and thereby, affect the Debt Service Ratio when homebuyers apply for a loan.

"In the market, when there are any changes, those people who do not plan to buy anything yet, might wait and see. Those who have already planned and decided, it would not affect their buying or investment decision, as we know that investment property is considered a hedge against inflation," she added.

According to property industry practitioners, the increasing rate of inflation in many parts of the world has yet to reach Malaysia.

## Stability in the industry

"Some countries are undergoing very high inflation. Just look at the United States. However, the situation in Malaysia is different. Inflation here is manageable and is mostly a result of increases in global commodity prices. Malaysians are protected from the worst of commodity prices by the fuel subsidies.

"In Malaysia, headline inflation will likely be somewhere between 2.2% and 3.2% this year. That is a manageable rate. There is still room for employment and business activity to grow significantly without causing inflation to surge," Ansari said.

When it comes to industry professionals such as developers and real estate practitioners, the property market will continue to remain stable.

"This OPR increment will mean a higher cost of borrowings to property developers now, especially for those

who are taking bridging loans for their developments but since the increase is kept nominal, no immediate significant impact is envisaged," Khong said.

"As real estate practitioners, be alert of the changing in the market. No matter what happens, we will continue to serve vendors to help them with sales or rent, for homebuyers always understand their needs and requirement and provide professional advice to them," Heng said.

The increase in the OPR is a reflection of BNM's confidence in Malaysia's economic rebound, rather than an attempt to safeguard against inflation. The state no longer feels the need for the economy to receive the support of having low interest rates. Rather, the increase displays a return to normalcy.

"As we've said before, we believe the housing market will react positively this year and in 2023 to the growing economy, household income, and employment. The GDP is expected to climb as much as 6.3% this year. The bank is projecting stronger domestic demand and higher exports.

"We expect positive economic conditions to drive strength in the real estate market that will really gather pace in the second half (of 2022) and in 2023," Ansari said.

For buyers and investors, Heng continues to caution against overstretching themselves. Even with the return to the status quo, property decisions should be made with proper financial planning and management, which is vital when deciding to buy or invest in real estate.

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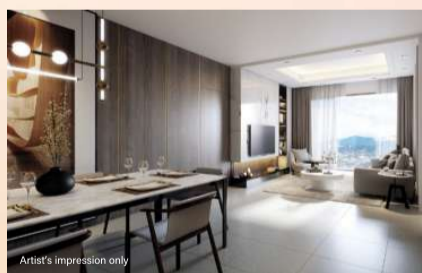


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# How are you? Instead, ask where are you?

Mental wellness in housing and urban planning

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**M**ALAYSIA'S mental health literacy rate is purported to be increasing, thanks to the awareness initiatives by various organisations, both government and non-government. However, it is still considered relatively limited compared to the more developed nations. With Malaysia's rapidly urbanising population, city-dwellers will find that it is their mental health that is especially at risk. Studies have shown that the urban physical environment can affect mental health but how does this happen?

"In Southeast Asia countries, Malaysia has the highest percentage of mental disorders. Mental disorders could affect anyone and more than one disorder at a time. The urban physical environment is essential to health and well-being as it can influence the city's liveability people's behaviour, encourage or discourage a person from being active, and improve an individual's ability to strive against an unhealthy lifestyle," Universiti Teknologi MARA Centre of Studies for Town and Regional Planning head Dr Marlyana Azyati Marzukhi said.

Marzukhi identified five factors that act independently to predict the risk of low mental health and vitality, which consists of noise annoyance, perceptions of crime, house overcrowding, access to green spaces and community facilities. These all seem to be common sense, but do we really think of the ways in which these stressors can impact our mental health?

## Impacted by environment

"We are affected by our environment directly and indirectly. Temperature, weather, traffic, pollution, and natural disasters, all affect our well-being. These factors in their extreme, contribute to distress," Sunway University School of Medical and Life Sciences associate dean (international) Dr Alvin Ng said.

"For example, floods directly affect those who experience it first hand, disrupting livelihood, therefore causing distress. These

disruptions are felt in the larger network of those who are directly affected by floods. News of these floods also contribute to the larger distress and discontentment among populations who are exposed to the news," he continued.

Mental well-being is related to a perceived sense of comfort, safety and security. If an environment is perceived as unsafe and uncomfortable, those exposed to the environment will more likely be stressed. It is this potential for prolonged discomfort and anxiety that the urban environment cultivates. All of which culminate into a non-conducive environment for mental health.

Housing is one of the important characteristics of a built environment as it is an essential requirement for shelter. The home is where one will spend a majority of their leisure time, or, as facilitated by the pandemic, where one will spend a majority of their time working as well.

"In an urban area, the cost of living is higher, land and spaces are limited, and most people could not afford medium and high-cost housing for a comfortable and better living due to their socioeconomic status limitation," Marzukhi said.

The high-stress environment low-income families endure has a direct impact on their mental health, which echoes the United Nations' statement that poverty is strongly linked to mental wellness. She pointed to low-income groups which reside in urban low-cost housing, which is affordable but lacking in quality.

"A good housing condition with sufficient space, higher housing quality, and better housing affordability will create better mental health. Many studies have shown that the urban physical environment, especially housing and provision of green spaces, is associated with mental health more than physical health," Marzukhi continued.

"Demand for housing will increase, and a higher density housing scheme will be built. It can cause low housing quality and inadequate provision of facilities,



"Healthy socialisation is the single most important factor contributing to our mental health," Ng said.



Green connectivity and better walkability are associated with less depression in the urban population, Marzukhi said.

including green areas and public spaces. This condition of the housing area appears to cause lower neighbourhood social ties due to lack of interaction and might be less interested in forming social connections," she said.

Housing is considered an essential determinant of health, happiness, and the quality of life depending on the provision of housing and the facilities that come with it. Living spaces should be conducive and safe to secure people doing their daily life routine with minimal feelings of negativity.

"The placement, design and quality of low-cost housing need to be reconsidered. A low-cost housing with a better suitable location and suitable design could help to improve mental health and promote an improved quality of life," Marzukhi said.

"It is crucial to design a city or neighbourhood area with good green connectivity, which will further encourage people to walk. The form of urban spaces and improvement of walkability in a city has positive changes for human behaviours and health outcomes," Marzukhi pointed out.

It is her understanding that social isolation or lack of close social ties is associated with poor health and occurs more frequently in city areas.

## Better walkability, better mental health

"Walking is a supported component of the urban physical environment, particularly the green connectivity and better walkability, which was associated with less depression in the urban population. Studies prove that neighbourhood walkability and cognitive function are physical activities that suggest a higher walkable neighbourhood provides opportunities to do exercise that can affect better mental health," she added.

As a destresser, nature is very effective, Ng explained. He noted that many mental health professionals would prescribe going back to nature and greenery to de-stress, recuperate and re-centre oneself.

"Firstly, fresher air. Breathing easier

helps with relaxation. There is also much less stimulation that is associated with the stress of work, city hustle and bustle and the likes of them. You're also not likely to have any phone signal in the bush or forest, so less likely to be disrupted by external communication and entertainment. Being among greenery also has an effect that helps people feel more grounded and centred," Ng explained.

However, a space cannot simply be designed to be green. It must also be designed to facilitate social cohesion and interaction, acting as a meeting point of a community. Urban planning has the powerful potential to shape the formation of social ties through social spaces, thereby influencing overall social relationships between family and friends.

"Understanding how urban planning facilitates social relationships that may further affect mental health is central to meeting the crucial aspect of planning and the health challenges of the urban population, which will cause a transformative effect on the lives of the community," Marzukhi said.

"Healthy socialisation is the single most important factor contributing to our mental health. We are social beings and we relish being accepted by others, while also being extremely averse to rejection. So, we crave acknowledgement and validation. Socialisation where we experience friendliness and support helps us thrive. On the contrary, socialisation that demeans and creates a sense of rejection contributes to personal distress," Ng said.

With many property developers focusing on sustainability, it seems Malaysia has finally stepped onto greener pastures, but the provision of eco-friendly features in neighbourhoods and cities are largely centralised to areas targeting middle to high-income groups.

"The improvement of human health and wellbeing as a key priority to achieve sustainable development goals. This seeks to address the major challenges of rapid urbanisation, including producing healthy and sustainable cities to foster prosperity and quality of life for all," Marzukhi said. 🏡

