



Editor's note: This is so well written, we are shamelessly reproducing it here.

By Praba Ganesan

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OCT 21 — Freedom is in the heart, so tying it to a physical space may seem futile.

But the heart — the way we feel about things — is triggered by our senses, by what we see, touch, hear, taste and more.

Which is why the proposed desecration of the Merdeka Stadium zone in order to construct a 100-storey building is sheer madness. If Nero had a fiddle, well our PM has a hard hat and matching drill set.

First, the policy supporters might handily point out that the building will be adjacent, and therefore does not affect adversely the stadium — or the rapidly-decaying Stadium Negara.

I'll contend on that affectation defence and its corollary purpose argument.

Walk up that hill, and see the space dynamics. It is a social zone.

No one wants to build a 100-storey commercial building encircled by not one, but two stadiums (three if you include Chinwoo stadium), the large compound of the oldest school in Kuala Lumpur (a heritage site), three mid-sized schools, a swimming pool, a basketball court building, a medium-sized police station with housing, churches and two Chinese temples — without fixing the surrounding to support it.

And in the extensions lie all types of complications, and yes other infrastructural investments.

The transport arteries, two monorails, one LRT station, a wide but congested Jalan Maharajalela, the idyllic Jalan Hang Jebat (Davidson) and nightmarish Jalan Hang Tuah (B.E. Shaw), which just got a flyover to ease the Edinburgh junction (well circle before), will be tested by the new traffic influx brought by the building and resultant commercial/residential constructs. And I'll just not talk about Jalan Stadium. Should we tell the new MRT dudes that there has to be a heritage station, or are we just to consider that after the fact?

Unless you think your typical expat oil and gas would like to occupy a rent-controlled "rumah tumpangan" (motels) in Jalan Sultan, there is the housing issue. So where will the six-star heritage hotel and service apartments situate themselves?

There is the parking question. New large buildings will need parking and entry/exit points so they do inflict more misery to standing roads connected.

Already Stadium Merdeka's parking lot acts as makeshift bus terminal for holiday periods, is that what it will be? A kinda old decrepit stadium with useful parking space.

And will the building have a shopping mall annex (Suria KLCC like) or are you going to ask the middle managers to have Hokkien mee at the Mirama Hotel?

The whole business of placing a gargantuan commercial property in a not-like type zone will produce a slew of uninvited infrastructure proposals. And the government will be hard-pressed to deny them, since it started the ball rolling.

And will my poor Stadium Merdeka seem like a commercial anachronism ready to be edged out in time for being out of topic with the new artificial zone? Just waiting for a PM to argue that a building to the sky is enough to remind us of our heritage?

And how about the spill-over effect to Kuala Lumpur? Is there a pressing shortage of office space, or one expected in the next five years?

Digging a hole to fill another hole will leave you another hole, elsewhere.

The 1998 diaspora from Dayabumi to Petronas (which is still after 12 years not with envious occupancy) left the latter with design without people and left that zone in a commercial time warp. Will there be a new migration to the new heritage building. Rent in such a building will be prohibitive unless you get your GLC tour truck to move there. What about the twin towers then?

Do they really believe if you build it they will come?

So then, to the why. Why we need a new skyscraper in KL?

Is it because there is no steady stream of visitors to Stadium Merdeka? The new high commercial-residential presence to prop up the forgotten site. I'll instead ask for a stadium heritage board with funding to showcase the stadium. A restoration effort will show the world all that the stadium has gone through as the heartbeat of the city and country for almost 60 years.

Athens still keeps intact the first modern Olympics (1896) stadium, even if it cannot facilitate present-day sporting events.

Is it because no one knows where Stadium Merdeka is that a skyscraper will remind alien life-form its location?

I understand the economic innocence in our former living prime minister from Kedah that spending leads to economic growth. That is a truism. The real question is how much growth does any spending brings, and what long-term impact does it have?

Building a RM5 billion tower without investing in our people just means more of our working-class kids with no social mobility thanks to a stagnant education system end up as guards, cleaners and food servers in that skyscraper.

Is it because there is much dreariness all over the hill since the Commonwealth Games of 1998 when the area was earmarked for a “friend” to commercialise?

There are various modern pilgrimage sites — the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Flushing Meadows in New York, Brandenburg Gate in Berlin — which have low density and are sparse.

People go there because they are cultural zones. And culture is not measured by new construction. It is enhanced by modernity. They have activity zones, green lungs and places for introspection, not more of the concrete jungle.

I'll donate a few chess sets if the police man the area with constables so the children can play — and the poets can have their quiet corners.

Spend money on public lavatories and water dispensers. The adjacent Taman Tunku Abdul Rahman, which has been boarded up for more than a decade, can be more than a junkie haven.

Melbourne's Federation Square and access to East Melbourne with the Yarra providing the backdrop is an example of what we should aspire to. I understand a low new-construction renewal project emphasising restoration is not appetising for the construction cartel with so much say on how taxpayer money is spent. You know who you are. You are not nameless to those who have memories and a resolve.

Never mind.

The area has to be living space for the soul. We have real thinkers who will have more than just a bunch of ideas to move on with the Merdeka air of the area.

Remember, Tunku Abdul Rahman went to the top of a hill where Chinwoo stadium sits now

intent on picking a spot for the country's first building in the mid-50s. Stadium Merdeka was to be Malaya's first construction to represent its independence, to mark the occasion.

He looked around the old city and picked the plot of land next to Victoria Institution. Unfortunately, the construction of the stadium required part of the school's parade ground and shooting range.

But it is there, today. How long we keep our stadium, well technically we decide.

It is the stadium of my father and many of yours. The greens around it are where the more modest Malaysian ate his "kacang putih" and waited for the turnstiles to open for a Merdeka Cup match.

The long walks from the various points in the city to and fro the stadium were a rite of passage for many. My school team thrashed the PM's school in that stadium for the 1987 state football championship and we sang "Are you sleeping Brother John?"

There are all these stories, and they are our stories.

The heritage building is the real Trojan horse leading to the annihilation of all that is old on that hill. It is not the celebration of our past, it will turn out to be the tomb for our past, and leave us with a series of developments that no one will remember fondly except those who build their immodest pension plans on the development contracts. Leave us with a poorer future.

That's not Merdeka.

** The views expressed here are the personal opinion of the columnist (- TheMalaysian Insider).*