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GOING BEYOND CONVENTION

Gamuda Land focuses on the future
with developments built around
visionary master planning, natural
scenery and strategic locations

Forging ahead

WITH the recent New Year and Lunar New Year festivities providing a welcome respite from the sluggish sentiment and lassitude afflicting the economy at large and the property segment in particular, developers, investors and property seekers alike have taken the opportunity to catch their breath while waiting out the latter phase of the sector's boom and bust cycle.

As the festive season draws to a close and the industry returns to business as usual, however, stakeholders across the sector are returning to the issues at hand, with this year expected to be a consolidation period for smaller players as larger firms ride out the storm. Some are taking a proactive approach to the problem, and are poised to launch campaigns aimed at boosting consumer demand in the coming months, including group purchase discounts and packaged services.

While these measures are generally reserved for players with deeper pockets, they benefit purchasers and investors at every tier of the market, with some developers going the extra mile to match those with loan financing challenges to institutions which can accommodate their needs. As the market adapts, such initiatives make it an ideal time

for purchasers to make the leap, though those looking for property appreciation may want to bide their time, as prices per square foot are projected to drop slightly in 2017.

Sitting down this month with the property arm of conglomerate Gamuda Bhd, *Living & Property* engages Gamuda Land Sdn Bhd COO Ngan Chee Meng on his take on the market and what developers can do to stay ahead in the game in the face of rising costs and affordability issues, as well as matters arising.

Other stories in this issue include a comparative look at leading property portals such as Property Pricetag, PropSocial and Sekai Property, offering a different focus on streamlined listings, crowdsourced forums and regional markets respectively, as well as an exploration of the relative pros and cons of the various rent-to-own schemes extant in the market.

Till next time, dear readers, here's to giving due props to property and to giving property its due.

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Going beyond convention

Gamuda Land focuses on the future with developments built around visionary master planning, natural scenery and strategic locations

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As stakeholders across the industry gird themselves for a challenging year ahead, analysts have projected a continued adjustment period within the property segment as the dual pressures of rising costs and sluggish sentiment shrink margins in a Darwinian onslaught upon smaller-cap players.

Developers with deeper pockets and more entrenched positions within the market will likely fare better, with most having weathered such storms in the past — notably the financial crises of 1997 and 2007. One such player, Gamuda Land Bhd, looks to the future with optimism, with a sales target of RM3 bil for FY2017.

Building a silver lining

“Broadly speaking, we expect market performance to remain at least comparable to last year’s. However, Malaysia is lucky in that it has seen a large amount of foreign direct investment, as well the rollout of a number of megaprojects such as the East Coast Rail Line, Kuala Lumpur–Singapore High Speed Rail and Pan-Borneo Highway. These will act as catalysts to spur development and job creation, with associated benefits for construction and property,” says Gamuda Land chief operating officer Ngan Chee Meng.

A chartered accountant by training, Ngan’s background includes tenures with industry leaders such as Coopers & Lybrand LLP — now PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) LLP and Hong Leong Industries Bhd. His time with PwC

was particularly instructive, introducing him to the inner workings of the property industry through his work with white knight developments.

Ngan would go on to collaborate with Gamuda Bhd as a finance manager at Hicom-Gamuda Development Bhd, facilitating the launch of its first township development, Kota Kemuning in Shah Alam. After a stint with Sistem Penyuraian Trafik KL Barat Sdn Bhd — the concessionaire for the Western Kuala Lumpur Traffic Dispersal Scheme (Sprint Highway) — he would later join Gamuda Land as group financial controller.

“At the time, in 2006, we had five or six projects running concurrently, but they were developed and marketed separately, without a single unifying vision. As such, we made the decision to consolidate these diverse teams, towards the positioning of Gamuda Land as a brand in and of itself,” he says, elaborating on the forging of the property arm of the group entity into its current shape.

Playing the long game

Ngan’s financial acumen and experience with both the property and infrastructure sides of the business would see him rise swiftly through the ranks, growing in tandem with the company. Today, Gamuda Land is aiming for the top, with plans to launch projects worth RM55 bil in gross development value (GDV) over the next 15 to 20 years.

Its strategy in striving towards this target revolves around three core principles. The first of these is effective master planning, which Ngan explains is crucial in creating and sustaining value for purchasers, owners and

users over time. The second is natural scenery, such as greenery, lakes and parks, which have changed over the years from a luxury for property developments to a practical necessity, as increasingly affluent and cosmopolitan purchasers demand a break from the pressures and drear surroundings of the urban lifestyle.

The third pillar, location, is a tenet tried and proven true by practice time and time again within the industry. Here, the developer leverages on its financial muscle to target key hotspots near confluences of major routes with undeniable growth potential, for both its domestic townships and its international projects — the latter of which account for a large part of its annual revenue. The group’s current landbank stands at 3,800 acres, primarily concentrated in the central region.

“To build a presence in markets overseas, you have to be willing to take a long-term view. That’s the nature of development. Our Vietnam and Singapore developments have done extremely well. Gem Residences in Singapore contributed 40% of total sales in the last financial year, with Celadon City in Ho Chi Minh City and Gamuda City in Hanoi contributing a total of 31%. The focus at this point is to grow our domestic market share, with a target ratio of 60:40 for local to overseas sales,” says Ngan.

“The market here may be softer, but there still is demand for the right type of products. Consumers will be looking for properties with value for money, and value can be derived from well-planned developments in good locations that offer beautiful environments and extensive amenities to provide residents with enhanced

Ngan’s financial acumen and experience with both property and infrastructure saw him rise to the ranks, culminating with his appointment as Gamuda Land COO in 2013



PHOTO BY JONATHAN LOI

As its name alludes, Gamuda Gardens will feature beautiful landscapes and natural vistas, including five cascading lakes integrated into a lush 50-acre central park with a majestic waterfall

quality of life and future capital growth. Smaller units are also popular, especially for first-time homebuyers and young families.”

Closer to home

While Gamuda Land’s strategy overseas has paid off in dividends, with its diversification into non-Ringgit revenue streams serving as a financial boon as the currency weakens, the group’s domestic projects have recorded robust performance as well, as properties within townships such as Horizon Hills in Iskandar Puteri and Bandar Botanic in Klang enjoy capital appreciation rates ranging from 21% to 47%.

Ngan attributes this success to a focus on the future, as expressed in the developer’s emphasis on master planning, natural features balanced with extensive amenities, and location — each of which require a certain degree of foresight and commitment to manage effectively. All three pillars are represented in its upcoming developments, such as Gamuda Gardens in North Sungai Buloh.

“Gamuda Gardens, as its name alludes, features beautiful landscapes and natural vistas, including five cascading lakes integrated into a lush 50-acre central park with a majestic waterfall, along with pocket parks such as the Wetlands and Adventure Playland, as well as lookout points which offer panoramic views of the verdant surroundings,” he says.

With a total GDV of over RM10 bil, the 810-acre mixed development sits amidst a network of three major highways, namely the Kuala Lumpur–Kuala Selangor (Latar), North–South and Guthrie Corridor Expressways. The township will include a city centre with commercial and business components, as well as a retail village overlooking its waterfall and lakes with amenities such as cafes, restaurants, a marketplace, spa and more.

Coming attractions

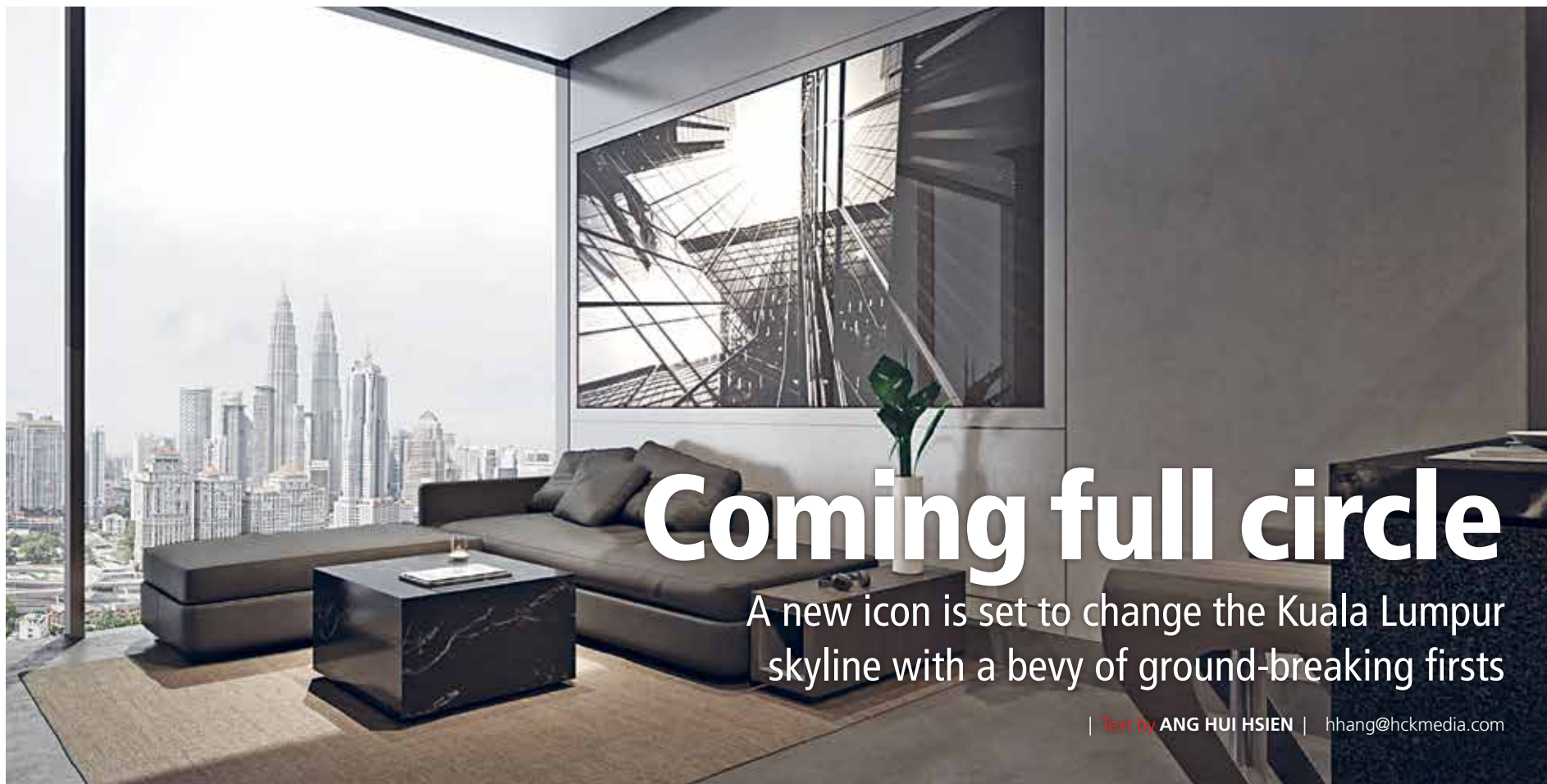
Prospective purchasers can look forward to the launch of Gamuda Gardens in the second quarter of the year. In terms of residential offerings, current plans for the development include 3,000 units ranging from link, semi-detached, cluster and bungalow products as well as serviced apartments, along with 3,000 units of affordable homes.

Estimates for built-up areas range from 1,997 sq ft to 2,100 sq ft for landed properties and 800 sq ft for serviced apartments, with a projected price at launch per unit of RM700,000 onwards. Other major projects in the pipeline for the developer include its RM3.8 bil twentyfive.7 development in Kota Kemuning as well as Gamuda Cove, located right next to the North–South Expressway Central Link (Elite Highway), with a GDV of RM12.9 bil.

Encompassing 257 acres, twentyfive.7 is envisioned as an avant-garde lifestyle project aimed at millennial-minded homebuyers, incorporating social spaces crafted with community, entertainment and lifestyle activities in mind, with residences featuring striking designs by Farm, a Singapore-based architecture atelier. Meanwhile, Gamuda Cove will be one of the group’s largest developments at 1,530 acres, and is slated for launch by 2018.

In delivering these and future projects, Ngan notes that Gamuda Land will be leveraging on its own approach to the industrialised building system (IBS) concept to maximise operational efficiency. Dubbed Gamuda IBS, he notes that two dedicated IBS factories have been planned to supply its in-house as well as external construction needs, with the first completed in Sepang in 2006 and the second, sited in Banting, targeted for completion in the third quarter of 2018.

“Our IBS differs from conventional approaches as the IBS precast industry in Malaysia is still reliant on manual open-yard casting methods. Ours is automated and run by state-of-the-art robotics in a controlled environment. Utilising 3D building information modelling and a common data environment, every single concrete pour for Gamuda IBS is carried out with a new set of moulds, allowing us to customise our designs for buildings that are architecturally pleasing and unique,” he concludes. ■



After vaulting into the national spotlight in 2012 with an announcement that it would be developing 10 projects with a total gross development value (GDV) of RM4 bil throughout the heart of Kuala Lumpur, boutique developer M101 Holdings Sdn Bhd is turning heads once again with its latest project, M101 Skywheel.

Scheduled to be completed in 2020, the mixed development is sited on two acres of land along Jalan Tun Razak in the city centre. However, the anticipation surrounding the project revolves around the signature Ferris wheel which gives the development its name. The skywheel will be positioned on the 52nd floor of the 80-storey building — a rather ambitious, and some say impossible, feat.

M101 Holdings CEO Datuk Seth Yap addresses these concerns by saying that the team has gone to great lengths to safeguard onsite

safety both during and after construction, including working with a company based in the Netherlands that pioneered a specific assembly system for Ferris wheels. While it will take one-and-a-half months to set the system up, the structure can be dismantled in roughly eight hours should the need arise.

Pointing out that the thrill of riding a Ferris wheel usually dies down after the first few minutes, Yap says that passengers will have the option of dining during their 35-minute ride. Though details on the attraction are still in the works, there are currently plans to put in 24 capsules, each of which can accommodate up to six people.

Breaking new ground

Also serving as the developer's flagship development, M101 Skywheel is the third project to carry the M101 name after M101 Dang Wangi and M101 Bukit

ABOVE:
The project features a strategic location in the heart of the city

RIGHT:
M101 Skywheel includes 96 suites designed by FA Porsche



Bintang, with both developments scheduled for handover in the third quarters of 2017 and 2018 respectively. The three projects have a total GDV of RM2.2 bil, with M101 Skywheel accounting for the bulk at RM1.8 bil.

Aside from the distinction of having a Ferris wheel with the world's highest vantage point at 220 metres, M101 Skywheel is also set to benefit from Klang Valley's growing Mass Rapid Transit network, as one of the stations will be integrated into its lower structure. Resting above the station are two towers consisting of retail spaces while SOFO (small offices flexible offices) units measuring 400 sq ft to 800 sq ft will occupy levels 12 and above.

A skymall — the first of its kind — with over 200,000 sq ft of retail space will take up four floors from levels 48 to 52. Sitting on the mall will be the Ferris wheel, flanked by the two towers. One tower will consist of 96 units of designer suites by Studio FA Porsche — the first mixed development project by the European design house — while the other will include the first Planet Hollywood Hotel in Asia.

Making a splash overseas

Admitting that the biggest challenge he faced

in pushing the project forward was skepticism, rather than the technical difficulties of putting a Ferris wheel on a building, Yap credits the development's international team of consultants and industry professionals with making it a reality.

M101 Skywheel has met with international success through its launches in China and Indonesia, with the trend expected to continue at upcoming sessions in Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan, Brunei and Singapore. Interest in the designer suites has also been encouraging, with most of it coming from international buyers.

The project has also received support locally. Yap reveals that many of the SOFO units have been taken up by Malaysian purchasers, which he attributes to their attractive prices, falling within the RM1,000 psf to RM2,000 psf range.

Having already achieved more than half of the developer's planned RM4 bil GDV, Yap says that its remaining projects will be launched within the next three years. Though declining to provide more details, he reveals that M101 Holdings has recently signed on a well-known international brand and will be working on creating another brand focusing on residential developments. ■



Yap says the project initially met with skepticism, though an international team of consultants and industry professionals have made it a reality

PHOTO BY DD HOE

Cultivating creativity through collaboration

Homegrown design studio iPartnership fosters innovation in design through intensive collaboration, both within and outside the firm

| Text by **FARA AISYAH** | faraaisyah@hckmedia.com

Interior design has evolved with time and technology. In the past, for example, interior décor was accomplished through judicious application of flourishes and accessories such as paintings, vases, carpets, curtains and luxury furnishings, but today, contemporary designers must take into account electrical fixtures, utility lines and even electronic devices when laying out a home or office.

As such, interior design requires not just a thorough understanding of the relationship between furnishings, fabrics and other aesthetic matters, it also entails a working knowledge of the functional aspects of spaces, colours and most recently, sustainability. Crafting the right interior for your home is essential because it is a pervasive and powerful part of our daily lives, affecting how we live, work and play.

The changing game

"Interior design has been progressing rapidly, and I personally think it has taken a life of its own. The industry grows at a fast pace, so my team and I must constantly strive for innovation in our designs, or else we will evaporate," says iPartnership Sdn Bhd managing partner Indra Ramanathan.

It has been a journey of discovery for Indra. He was originally trained as an architect in The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia, going on to work with several studios all around Asia after concluding his studies.

Returning to Malaysia, he began working with the Kuala Lumpur branch of global architectural and consulting practice Woods Bagot in 1995 as a partner and managing director. Now a registered interior designer with the Board of Architects Malaysia, Indra shares that he has seen the profession change through the years, particularly within iPartnership's area of focus, which he terms "innovative offices".

"The rapid transformation in the industry makes people redefine a workplace. What is it actually? Is it literally an office space or is it a place to do work? Because of technology, we can basically work from everywhere, be



The hot-desking concept is applied in one of the studio's latest office designs



Interior design has evolved with technology and the times, says Indra

PHOTO BY SHARIL AMIN

it home or even coffee houses. When people realise that not everyone needs a desk, they start to create offices that allow sharing, for example hot-desking and co-working spaces," says Indra.

According to Indra, innovative offices improve work processes as employee productivity is enhanced by adapting spaces to user needs, instead of the other way round. How-

ever, he notes, many operators and designers are going about it the wrong way, simply duplicating the design approach of Google Inc's celebrated Googleplex in California, which may not be appropriate for every business model.

Tailored to fit

"It's always about the right fit for the right people. The first

thing to do before someone even plans the design of an innovative workplace is to research the organisation they are working for. They have to understand the nature of the business and the needs of the employees. Think about the purpose of a feature before you decide to include it, think about the location and climate as well. Start from scratch and it will turn out to be a beautiful place," he says.

"In design, we avoid fleeting fashions in favour of creating bespoke environments. We explore new ideas all the time, and avoid reusing them in order to create fresh solutions for any given client we work with. For example, we designed the interiors of Shell Malaysia's new offices. Shell's domestic offices were previously located at 11 different locations throughout the country, and its management decided to consolidate these to two sites, namely its head offices at Menara Shell, Kuala Lumpur and the Shell Business Service Centre in Cyberjaya. So what we did is we went to each existing office, looked at what they had there and then decided how the two new offices would take all of it into account — the nature of their workplaces and business."

iPartnership also crafted the interiors of AirAsia Asean's flagship offices in Jakarta, Indonesia. As its regional headquarters, the brief for the facility was to create a dynamic office to support the work of teams representing markets throughout Asean. The studio then took inspiration from each Asean nation as themes for 10 semi-enclosed flexible pods, each capable of opening up to merge into larger modules, with the open arrangement of the general office space designed according to activity-based principles. The two wings of the office also house a unique custom designed workbench that allows scalability to seat 13 to 26 employees without any effect on the work area.

Indra's team used similar principles in designing the Mid Valley City office of market research agency Kantar TNS. A workplace specifically designed for the Kantar TNS team, it consists of areas delineated by activity — for example, it includes a "quiet" area where employees can concentrate on solo work, or communal spaces where colleagues can brainstorm and have discussions in a casual setting.

Not limited to office spaces, the studio has also designed for famous fine dining establishments and bars such as Vin's Restaurant & Bar in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Vineria. It in Bangsar Shopping Centre, The Sultan Lounge in Mandarin Oriental, Kuala Lumpur and more. These lifestyle venues

differ widely from other projects even though they were created by the same team, shares Indra, as they have their own souls and "DNA".

"We maintain our originality in design and fresh ideas despite being in the industry for so long by discussing and sharing project ideas with a wide range of people. For instance, we have an art director who does graphics for the company, and he doesn't come from an interior design background. However, we still pick his brain on how we should deliver certain projects. If you mix all the different perspectives that people have, you will end up with remarkable results. Your design will become extraordinary. If you are a trained interior designer and you only practise by the book, you will be the same as everyone else. You need innovation to set yourself apart," he says.

iPartnership also collaborates with domestic architectural firms to deliver projects, with one notable venture being the Alice Smith School Primary Campus in Kuala Lumpur. Here, while noting the team's experience in interior design, Indra qualifies that architectural practice lies outside of its scope, necessitating a partnership with Kuala Lumpur-based practice Lee Chor Wah Architect for the project.

In addition, the studio engaged Kenn Fisher, Associate Professor in Learning Environments in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at The University of Melbourne, to interpret the brief given by the school in the initial planning stages so it could be visualised from the design and architectural points of view. The school's new dining hall and one stop centre later received the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) Category 13 Gold award for collaboration.

"If you are doing a project and your driver is profit, for example, you will get one end product. If you are doing design from a technical point of view, you will get a different result. Our solutions are different because design comes first for us. When we are working on a project, we will discuss the theme our clients want to see with them and work with them to bring it to life," concludes Indra. ■



The lighting and use of bare brick walls, as well as the introduction of linear mirrors, create a vintage feeling in Vins



The Kantar TNS office incorporates spaces for group discussions as well as solo work

PHOTOS BY JONATHAN LOI

Sustainability and environmentally-friendly principles are now a common feature of construction and business practice, to the extent that the Green Building Index (GBI) has seen a 70% growth in the number of projects registering for green certification in Malaysia, despite an economic climate rife with uncertainty and rising costs.

In addition, the number of GBI-certified projects in the country has risen from 327 in 2015 to 380 in 2017, indicating a steady increase in buildings with energy, water and other resource-saving features. However, an emerging field of study — dubbed buildingomics — has led to new insights into how green buildings can enhance the performance of their users, and even help improve the quality of their sleep.

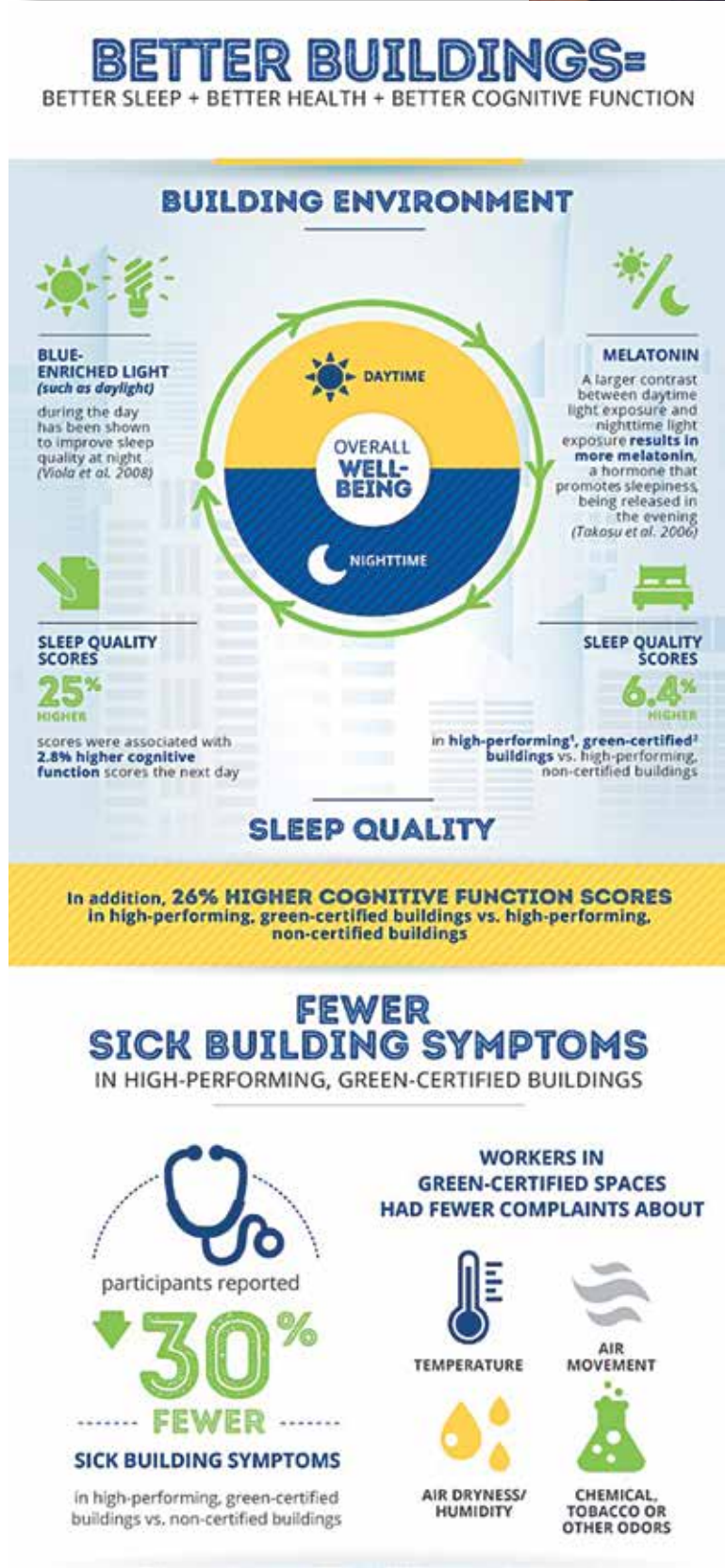
The science of sustainability

“Buildingomics came about from a series of new studies, led by Harvard University and the State University of New York (SUNY) Upstate Medical University, which found that occupants of high-performing green buildings showed higher cognitive function scores, fewer sick building

Going green pays off

New insights from a Harvard University study suggest that green buildings can enhance productivity and quality of sleep for users

| Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com



syndrome symptoms and higher sleep quality scores than workers in high-performing buildings without green certification,” says John Mandyck, United Technologies Corporation (UTC) chief sustainability officer.

“This suggests that if you work in a green-certified building, you’re likely to sleep better and feel better — which can then improve how well you perform at work. This presents clear economic value for three distinct groups of stakeholders around the world.”

The first group, investors, has shown increasing appetite for sustainable, responsible and impact (SRI) investment avenues, with some even exclusively pursuing SRI commitments due to their long-term potential. Green buildings have obvious applications here, with the Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark reporting a total of US\$7.6 trillion (RM33.7 trillion) in institutional investment funds going towards green building development in the last five years.

Building owners can also benefit financially from green buildings, with research by Maastricht University associate professor (finance and real estate) Nils Kok showing that such buildings exhibit 3% higher rental rates, generate 7% more cash flow and command 13% higher transaction prices when sold than those without green certifications.

“Finally, the benefit for people living or working in green buildings has long been surmised, but now we have hard data to prove it. A research team led by Harvard University produced two landmark studies that show higher cognitive test scores for people who work in certified green

buildings. In one study, the Harvard team found a 101% improvement in cognitive test scores for people working in an environment with optimised indoor environmental quality versus a standard office building,” says Mandyck.

New frontiers of understanding

Using this data, the Harvard team estimated a US\$6,500 (RM28,800) per person annual productivity benefit. Following up on this research, dubbed the Cogfx study, 109 office workers from 10 high-performing buildings in Boston, Denver, San Francisco and Los Angeles were studied for a week, with controls for factors such as education, salary, type of work performed and more.

Participants were found to experience 30% fewer sick building syndrome symptoms — a condition where acute health and well-being concerns are linked to time spent in a building — as well as 6.4% higher sleep quality scores. The results have far-ranging implications for the construction and design of buildings today, whether residential, commercial or otherwise.

“In addition to green certification, factors like ventilation and air quality can contribute to employee productivity and well-being, as the team found in the first Cogfx study, which studied participants’ cognitive function scores in indoor environments with varying air quality. The newest study found that green certification, thermal conditions, and lighting also influenced worker perceptions of their space as well as their cognitive function,” says Mandyck. ■

Meeting the market halfway

Younger Malaysians are the have-nots of the property segment.

What can be done to help first-time home seekers make their first purchase?

| Text by **FARA AISYAH** | faraaisyah@hckmedia.com

With the current challenges faced by younger home seekers in purchasing their first property, the government introduced several measures in Budget 2017 designed to assist this segment in finding alternative accommodations. One of these initiatives is the construction of approximately 10,000 houses in urban areas for rental to eligible youths with permanent jobs, including young graduates entering the labour market.

Participants may rent these units for up to a maximum five years, at rates lower than market standards, giving them a place to stay while they strengthen their financial position towards the purchase of a permanent property. While addressing short-term accommodation needs, this approach has raised concerns from some quarters due to its emphasis on short-term lodgings instead of addressing the larger issue of affordability.

One solution proposed has been the implementation of rent-to-own (RTO) principles for these units, an approach where potential buyers rent a home for a set length of time before exercising an option to purchase the property when or before the lease expires.

Various RTO schemes have actually been offered by several states and agencies in Malaysia, including PR1MA (1Malaysia People's Housing Programme), RumaWIP (Federal Territory Affordable Housing Policy), and Selangor Smart Sewa, as well as Program Sewa Beli Kerajaan Johor.

Looking for answers

"People wonder if it's the right decision to implement RTO in Malaysia. It actually depends on the market situation. If you look at the current stagnant state of the industry, it is a good time to put RTO into action to help those who cannot afford to buy a property," says Laurecap Sdn Bhd executive director Stanley Toh.

Rei Mediacion Sdn Bhd director Khalil



PHOTO BY JONATHAN LOI

Toh believes the rental market will start to pick up in six to nine months

il Adis concurs, noting that the measures taken by the government are a boon to young Malaysians concerned about home ownership.

As a concept, RTO is relatively new to Malaysia, with some time necessary for the



PHOTO BY SHARIL AMIN

The younger generation should purchase a property as soon as they can, says Khalil

industry to adapt and for authorities to finalise fair guidelines regarding its implementation. Towards this end, Toh believes that the government needs to collaborate with local industry players to outline a method which can benefit both developers and purchasers

participating in RTO schemes.

"RTO can be viewed in a positive light for both parties. For instance, the property can become an asset for the tenants if the rental they are paying every month becomes the down payment for the property at the end of the day. Developers, on the other hand, would have more to lose when RTO is practised, particularly as market shares decline; however, implementing an RTO project can also be a profitable way for them to sell their units. I personally think developers should look into it as an opportunity they could tackle with some degree of flexibility," says Khalil.

"Developers are the ones dealing with a lot of challenges in RTO engagement, and the main difficulty is the land cost. The highest expense in any development is the land, and if we ask a private developer to create an RTO project, it may not always be so feasible for the company. If, however, the state government can provide the land, while developers plan and build the project, as they have the expertise to do so, that would perhaps be more practical," adds Toh.

A workable solution

Although industry demand this year will still focus primarily on affordable housing, many young Malaysians still face the prospect of only being able to rent property, due to issues such as high loan rejection and graduate unemployment rates. If RTO were to be widely applied in the country, it would ease their transition into the larger property market.

"The scheme is more common in European countries and the United States because the properties there are severely unaffordable. I'm afraid by the time Malaysia become a fully developed nation, perhaps in 2020, the younger generations will end up renting homes for life. They should use RTO as a temporary means for them to save some money while renting, in order to purchase a property before it's too late," concludes Khalil. ▣

Projects with associated RTO schemes should receive a positive response from the market if they are strategically located, with satisfactory accessibility and amenities available



PHOTO BY DD HOE

Vibrant furnishings in vogue

Kare pampers Malaysian designers and interior decorators with the epitome of European elegance

| Text by FARA AISYAH | faraaisyah@hckmedia.com

Novel home offerings in Malaysia have tended to be the exception rather than the rule, with the market leaning towards conventional accessories for interior spaces. However, growing affluence among consumers has led to healthy demand for unconventional furnishing options, even given the dampened sentiment afflicting the industry of late.

Stepping in to address this gap, German wholesaler and retailer Kare opened its doors to the Malaysian market in 2013, presenting a complete range of furniture, lighting and home accessory products to excite and stimulate the home décor segment, focusing on unique, non-conformist designs full of imagination and inspiration.

Keeping in style

“Kare is different because it is a voguish brand. I personally think of Kare more as fashion apparel rather than a home furnishing label, as it continuously introduces exciting new merchandise to the market. It launches approximately 2,000 new stock keeping units (SKUs) annually, which most furniture stores do not have the ability to do. Therefore, we see ourselves as a trend-setter in the business,” says Kare Malaysia senior operations manager Brendan Ho.

The brand launches new collections seasonally on Kare’s RedboxxDay, with the label’s diverse franchisees congregating to witness the occasion at its headquarters in Munich. With the event occurring at least thrice a year, and the number of new SKUs launched at each event, designers and home decorators across the world can anticipate a medley of new styles every season, with consignments going out roughly every



Ho shares that Kare Malaysia is slowly but surely expanding in the near future

month to Kare’s partners in various markets.

In the domestic context, Kare caters to a wide range of interiors across various segments, including both residential and commercial spaces. However, its primary target is the commercial segment, with hotels, restaurants, sales offices and other business establishments always on the lookout for eccentric, one-of-a-kind centrepieces.

A personalised portfolio

In terms of imprints, Kare+ by Studio Divani is the crème de la crème of Kare’s



The brand focuses on unique, non-conformist designs full of imagination

PHOTOS BY ANWAR FAIZ

exclusive portfolio. The line represents dual sofa and bedframe collections, which combine Italian design and premium quality with custom-made production at reasonable prices.

Sofas in the Kare+ line can be customised down to the type of materials used, from Italian leather to woven or crafted fabrics. Options such as arm, feet and back rests can also be incorporated, depending on individual preferences. Customers are spoilt for choice, with 120 design variations and colour tones to select from. For these products, Kare relies on traditional craftsmanship methods, using exclusive leather made of cowhide as well as textiles produced in Italy.

The workshops for these gems are all located in Tuscany, Italy. Following production, the items are then delivered directly to Kare in Germany without the use of intermediaries; a strategy which Ho explains maintains exclusivity for the brand. Studio Divani’s bedframes can be tailored according

FROM TOP: Kare+ by Studio Divani comes with 120 design variations and colour tones for customers to select from

Kare Kuala Lumpur offers a full range of furniture, lighting and home accessory products

to customer specifications as well.

Aside from its custom pieces, Kare also has a “60’s Cocktail” collection, highlighting retro stylings which are anticipated to make a comeback in 2017. “The 60’s Cocktail line was launched recently, and has received encouraging response so far. We have always believed in bright, strong colours and more sophisticated hues for different moods and settings. Kare is about being bold and fun, so we do not have one particular colour that we emphasise

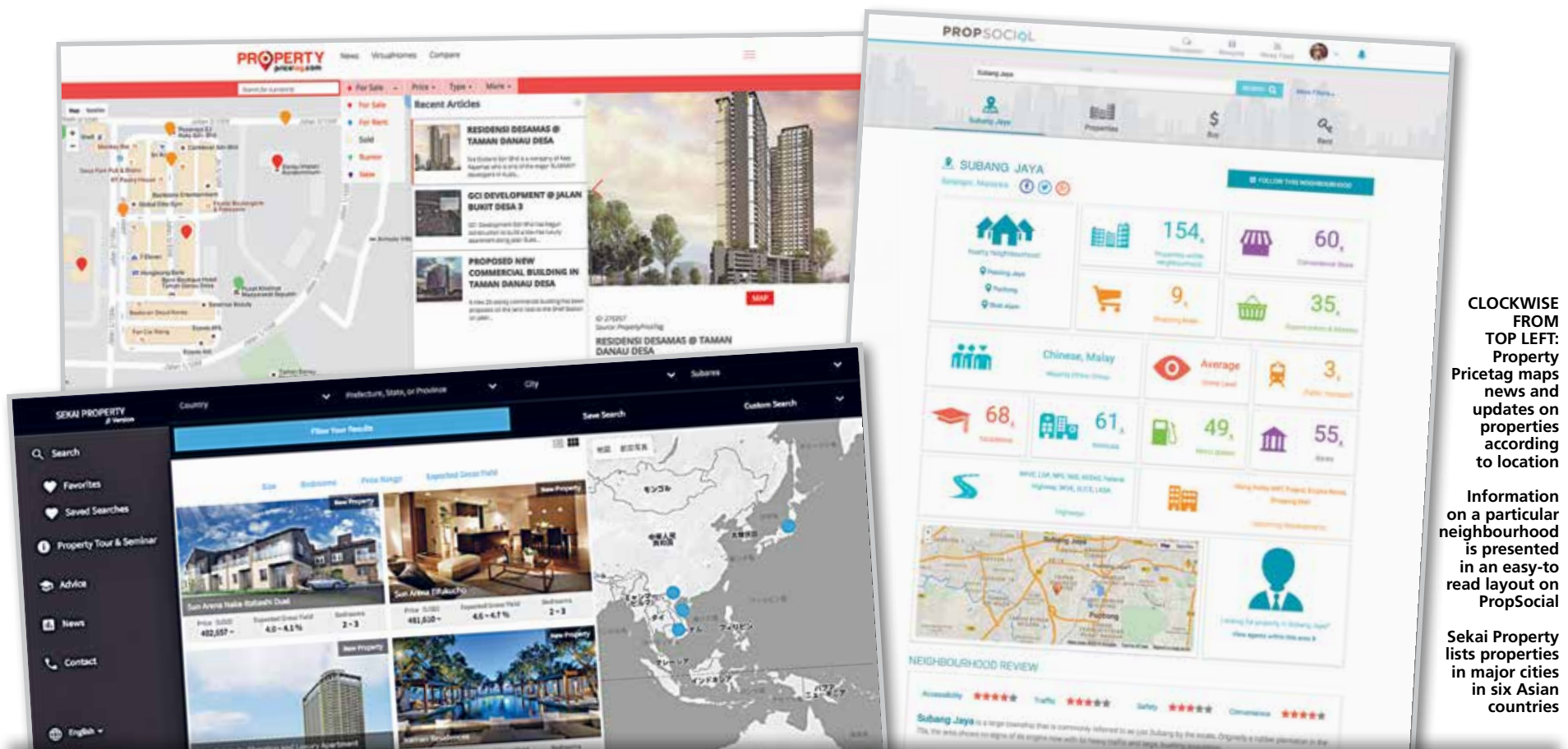
in our product design,” says Ho.

The team views 2017 as a challenging year, though they temper their outlook with optimism when it comes to potential opportunities. “We will be very cautious and prudent with each step and project that we intend to embark on. There are definitely expansion plans for Kare Malaysia in the pipeline, but there is nothing concrete yet for us to share, especially when the overall market is soft and cautious,” concludes Ho. ■

Picking the right portal

Living & Property takes a look at three leading property portals to gauge their relative pros and cons

| Text by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Property Pricetag maps news and updates on properties according to location

Information on a particular neighbourhood is presented in an easy-to-read layout on PropSocial

Sekai Property lists properties in major cities in six Asian countries

As technology evolves and consumers become increasingly proficient with the wealth of tools and information available online, they are less likely to remain content with just bare facts and figures, as more comprehensive sources become prevalent. This applies to property as well, with no shortage of websites available to help potential purchasers make informed decisions when buying and selling real estate.

When it comes to gauging their relative merits, the apparel market works as an apt comparison, with no one-size-fits-all solution capable of catering for the needs of every individual customer. Each portal has its own strengths and weaknesses, and users may need to visit several portals in order to achieve their objective — be it buying their dream home, getting the best price for their property or simply researching new developments in a particular area.

Bridging the information gap

Both launched in 2015, Property Pricetag and PropSocial were established after their founders noticed a common shortcoming among many existing property websites — namely the presence of too many or repeat listings, with too little actual information. Tackling this issue, Property Pricetag chief executive officer Cha-ly Koh and her team uses an algorithm that searches through multiple portals

and eliminates duplicate listings, only showing results that are most relevant to users based on their search parameters.

It also has a virtual viewing feature which it shares with its sister website PropSpider that allows interested buyers to have a 360-degree view of property without being on location. This effectively reduces the number of fruitless viewing appointments and increases the chances of closing deals.

However, Property Pricetag's primary role is providing information, which it does with its team curating news already reported in the media and conducting research to create original content. These are mapped to locations and address a wide range of subjects, from upcoming projects to the correlation between house prices and the number of cafés in a neighbourhood.

PropSocial also provides data, with the added option of “following” a particular neighbourhood so that users can get instant updates on their news feed. Information about the area such as the number of properties and their historical transacted prices, amenities and crime level as well as a breakdown of the local population's ethnicity are all laid out in easy-to-read charts and infographics.

The platform prides itself on its user reviews of properties and locations that work very much like TripAdvisor, as well as discussion boards where the public can get property advice from other property owners, real estate negotiators

and seasoned investors, who are rewarded for their contributions. These forums are generated through crowdsourcing, which PropSocial general manager Magdelin Tan says is crucial as genuine insights from the community help property buyers make better decisions with fewer hassles and in less time.

The team also posts frequent property-related updates, as well as informative stories and leisure articles. The portal even claims to be the first property portal in Malaysia offering content in Chinese to cater to their large base of Chinese-educated users.

A regional approach

Officially launched in February with a mission to make it easier and safer to purchase and sell properties abroad, Asian listings take the forefront at Sekai Property, with featured properties from major cities in Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia and Japan. According to founder Endo Tadayoshi, buying a house on the other side of the world should not be more difficult than buying a house in a local neighbourhood.

Much like Property Pricetag and PropSocial, the portal also offers information on specific market laws, tax regulations, statistics and other details of the markets it covers within the region. Parked under its News and Advice tabs, this information is available in multiple languages. ■

Property Pricetag

- Generates results from multiple websites
- Eliminates duplicate listings
- Virtual viewing feature
- Maps news and content according to location

PropSocial

- “Follow” option for instant updates
- Easy-to-read layout
- Honest insights generated via crowdsourcing
- Posts available in English and Chinese

Sekai Property

- Listings of properties in six Asian countries
- Offers information on the regulations of each country
- Translates property details into multiple languages

Partnering to promote affordability

SIME Darby Property Bhd recently signed a memorandum of agreement with the Construction Research Institute of Malaysia (CREAM), pooling their resources to commercialise the Divergent Dwelling Design (D3) concept aimed at enhancing affordable housing with new methods of design and construction, including precast and modular elements.

In line with the strategy, a D3 prototype gallery will be built at Sime Darby's Elmina West development in the township of Elmina, Shah Alam, which will be completed by mid-2017, just in time for the Sime Darby Property D3 Sustainable Homes initiative to kick off in Q3 2017. Its pilot project, Harmoni 1 in Elmina West, will be the first affordable housing project to adopt the new approach, consisting of 562 apartment units with built-ups from 900 sq ft to

1,000 sq ft, complemented by shop office units.

In other news, Sime Darby customers will get a good start in the Year of the Rooster as those who purchase selected properties between Jan 28 and Feb 28 will be entitled to a rebate of RM8,888 on their initial 10% down payment. They will also get a family dinner for 10 at China Treasures, a fine dining Chinese restaurant in Sime Darby Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

The promotion applies to properties within the developer's townships such as Bukit Jelutong, the City of Elmina, Saujana Impian, Bandar Ainsdale, Nilai Impian and many more. Sime Darby Property managing director Datuk Jauhari Hamidi says that this promotion will help first-time homeseekers acquire property while providing customers with an investment opportunity. ■



From left: CREAM Board of Trustees member Datuk Ahmad 'Asri Abdul Hamid, executive director Zuhairi Abd Hamid and chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Tajuddin Ali, and Sime Darby Property COO Datuk Wan Hashimi Albakri and managing director Datuk Jauhari Hamidi

Dancing with the lions

MATRIX Concept Holdings Sdn Bhd recently launched its Legend of the Lion Dance campaign at d'Tempat Country Club in Bandar Sri Sendayan, Seremban, ushering in the Chinese New Year festive season for residents of the township as well as surrounding areas.

The campaign included a series of events and activities ranging from traditional Chinese calligraphy, fan painting, *tanglung* decoration and clay art demonstrations, running weekends from Jan 21 to Feb 12. The developer spared no expense in organising the festivities, with the largest ceremonial "lion head" in Negeri Sembilan constructed to mark the occasion, as well as decorations for d'Tempat to the tune of RM250,000. ■



From left: Matrix Concept Holdings non-independent non-executive director Datuk Logendran Narayanasamy, group managing director and CEO Datuk Lee Tian Hock, chairman Datuk Haji Mohamad Haslah Mohamad Amin, Wushu Federation of Malaysia (WFM) vice-president Chong Kim Fatt and Matrix Concept Holdings group deputy managing director and COO Ho Kong Soon at the launch of the campaign

Ring in the new year

NEARLY 4,000 guests thronged the halls of Setia City Convention Centre, Setia Alam in celebration of SP Setia Bhd's third Perfect Reunion Chinese New Year 2017 event, featuring a lively line-up of performances, activities, and appearances by Astro celebrities.

The occasion also saw the conclusion of the developer's "Setia Back to No 1" contest, with SP Setia purchaser



The Setia Back to No 1 event saw winners walking away with prizes including a Battersea Power Station apartment in London worth RM2,200,000

Louis Tan Xin Wei taking home the grand prize of a Battersea Power Station apartment in London worth £400,000 (RM2,200,000). Aside from this, 12 other participants in the lucky draw received prizes including cruises to destinations in Asia and Europe as well as return trips to London's annual Chelsea Flower Show.

In other news, the SP Setia Foundation, serving as the group's corporate social responsibility arm, held an informative session themed "The Caring Agent: Impact Makers Talk" for more than 50 students from secondary schools throughout Selangor, as part of its Setia Caring School programme aimed at fostering the idea of a "caring" society among education stakeholders.

The event included experience-sharing sessions by Red Bubbles founder Iskandar Syah Ismail, The Picha Project co-founder Kim Lim and Feed Our Loved Ones (FOLO) founder Jason Lim, who spearhead initiatives aimed at bringing laughter to seriously ill children in hospitals, providing financial empowerment to marginalised groups and promoting urban farming respectively.

Also gracing the occasion was SP Setia Foundation chairman Tan Sri Wan Mohd Zahid Mohd Noordin, who noted that the cultivation of interest among students and future leaders was critical in making "caring" a household word for the nation. ■



Eco World Foundation CEO Datuk Capt (Rtd) Liew Siong Sing (second from left) and Lee (fourth from left) with the staff and students of Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) Serdang Baru 1 at the handing over ceremony

Answering education needs

ECO World Foundation responded to the plea of Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) Serdang Baru 1 by donating 230 sets of desks and chairs to replace the school's worn-out furnishings. Present during the handover ceremony held at the school in Seri Kembangan, Selangor was foundation chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, who said that the belief that a good education can change someone's life for the better is what drives their focus to provide assistance to needy schools.

Since being established by Eco World Development Group Bhd in 2014, the foundation has donated more than 2,000 sets of desks and chairs and spent approximately RM330,000 to replace school furniture and provide other facilities. Its main programme is the Eco World Students Aid Programme (SAP), which offers financial assistance to underprivileged primary and secondary students. ■



Ko (right) giving out ang pau to children

Cheering for charity

THE sounds of Chinese New Year music and drums rang through the halls of IOI Mall Puchong recently as the management treated 40 underprivileged children and 20 elderly folks to a day of festivities. Kicking off the event was IOI Mall centre manager Roger Ko, who had the honour of dotting the lion's eye in a traditional blessing ceremony. This was followed by a lion and dragon dance as well as a drum performance.

Making an appearance was the God of Prosperity and Big Head Buddha — both familiar figures during the festive season — who gave away mandarin oranges, sweets and vouchers to shoppers. The underprivileged children and elderly folks also received goodie bags, *ang pau* and basic foodstuff packages, with the kids also getting a chance to go on the shopping centre's train, carousel and 6D motion rides. ■