

17-storey school plan in KL sparks safety concerns

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA
MOHD RASHIDI-
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: The Kuala Lumpur City Hall's proposal to build a 17-storey school in the city centre has sparked concerns over its practicality and safety.

This includes student evacuation during emergencies, overcrowding during peak hours, and the lack of sufficient outdoor spaces.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa said the concept was to optimise land use in the city centre.

Universiti Teknologi Mara School of Civil Engineering senior lecturer Dr Hazrina Mansor cautioned that while building a 17-storey school in the city centre is technically feasible, its suitability for students, teachers, and the urban environment remains questionable.

She highlighted significant safety concerns especially on evacuations as in the event of a fire or emergency, safely evacuating hundreds of children from the upper floors would be challenging without using elevators, which

➤ Evacuating hundreds of children from upper floors during emergencies would be challenging as even in normal situations, using elevators to move about in such premises is far from ideal: Lecturer

cannot be relied upon in such situations.

"A mid-rise school of between seven and 10 storeys with nearby sports and community facilities might be a better balance between space-saving and creating a good learning environment. SMK Sri Sentosa in Kuala Lumpur is an example of a mid-rise school with 10 storeys," she told *theSun*.

Hazrina said one of the biggest challenges is the heavy reliance on elevators. In a 17-storey school, elevators would be crucial for student and staff movement, but they are susceptible to mechanical failures, wear and tear, and high energy usage.

"Frequent servicing, emergency backup systems, and smart scheduling are necessary to

prevent congestion and breakdowns, making elevator maintenance a costly and recurring task."

Hazrina said even in normal situations relying on elevators for students and teachers to move between classes is far from ideal.

"Maintaining a high-rise school wouldn't be cheap either, it includes the cost of running elevators, safety systems, and extra energy consumption just to keep the school operational," she said, adding that during peak hours or emergencies, the reliance on stairwells increases, requiring reinforced structures, anti-slip coatings, and strict crowd management protocols to ensure safe movement.

Hazrina said it is also important

for schools to have playgrounds and open spaces for children to play and socialise. A 17-storey school would limit these opportunities.

"While rooftop playgrounds or indoor sports courts are possible, they do not provide the same experience as a traditional school field as limited outdoor time could impact students' mental health, motivation, and focus.

Hazrina also said a high-rise school in a densely populated area could benefit the surrounding neighborhood by supporting urban development and improving educational access in areas with limited land.

"However, there are also potential negative impacts that must be carefully managed, including increased traffic congestion during drop-off and pick-up times. Without proper planning, this could cause noise pollution, parking shortages, and disruptions for residents and businesses.

"From an educational perspective, a mid-rise design would offer a more practical balance ensuring better safety, smoother movement, and a healthier learning environment, while still making effective use of limited urban space," she said.

National Association of Private Educational Institutions secretary-general Dr Teh Choon Jin said schools need to have a policy and system to maintain adequate supervision and discipline.

He said the current prefects system used in schools can be further enhanced to maintain discipline, and continuous enforcement and reminders of safety throughout is crucial.

"Vertical school model will not change the teaching methods but what is required is effective use of space within the school environment.

"The operations of the school should emphasise safety at all costs and continuous improvement and maintenance of safety aspects. There should be sufficient CCTV to monitor every floor and safety measures in place."

A high-rise school should not affect students' learning experience, social interactions, or overall well-being, as it is a physical structure that facilitates education, he said.



OPEN AIR IFTAR ... Muslims break fast with their families and friends on the first day of Ramadan at Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday. — **BERNAMAPIC**