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When Dreams Come True



Some buyers are well-off persons who really want to live at the apartments, while some others think of a flat as merchandise for trading. "Reality market never collapses totally, like car market. You may have lesser profit, or you have to keep merchandise unsold for a long time. That's why those people with enough capital still buying houses and flats," a responsible person of Shwe San Ein Reality Agency explained.

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"There are also Myanmar technicians who meet international standard"



I feel bad because Myanmar people are overly impressive with the foreigners. Among Myanmar technicians, there are some if not many who match international standard. If you hire the foreigner, it's difficult to discuss with him but quite easy with our own people. And the service charges will be more reasonable. If the locals are paid twice, they will work more than two times. The design drawn by the foreigners could not be used exactly as per plan. For example, the condition of brick is different between abroad and here.

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"What the resident said about her condominium"



No. I would rather live in the bungalow. I have found one already.

Daw Si Si (Pearl Condominium)

I intend to live here permanently.

Daw Nyein Nyein (Yuzana Tower)

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"When Dreams Come True"

Zayar Ohn

Myint Zaw Aung

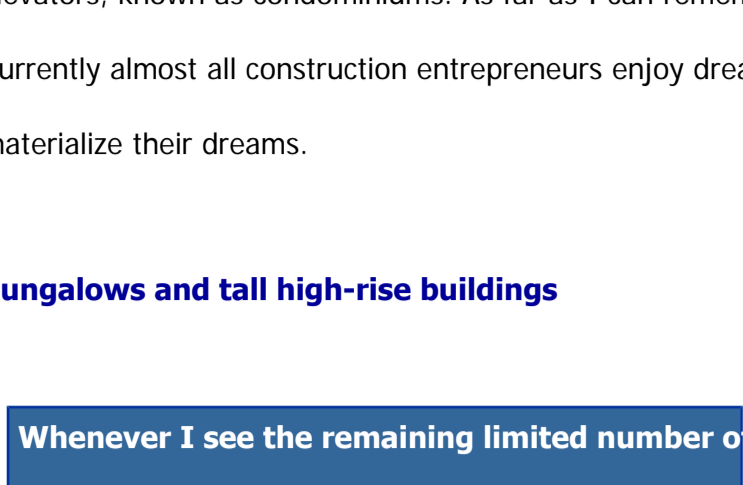
Photo:Myint Zaw Aung

Some 30 years ago when we were very young we could see high-rise buildings only in foreign movies. Then Edwardian-style buildings and semi-brick buildings only, were existed in Yangon.

After that Hong Kong style buildings with mezzanine floors, which looked like two or three-storied buildings, appeared. When there was no more emergence of Hong Kong style buildings, eight-storied buildings existed. The height of each floor measured almost the same to that of a Westerner's. The next development led to the emergence of high-rise buildings with elevators, known as condominiums. As far as I can remember the condominiums began to exist less than a decade ago.

Currently almost all construction entrepreneurs enjoy dreaming about high-rise buildings. Some of them are trying to materialize their dreams.

Bungalows and tall high-rise buildings



"In order to meet the requirement of urban development there will be no more bungalows in town centre, except those some areas owned by very rich people," commented a foreign-trained urban development plan expert. I am not happy for disappearance of detached bungalows, which I used to see since my boyhood. We could not afford to stay at nice houses in beautiful compounds on Kha-yay-pin Street (living quarter of rich people and diplomats in Yangon), though, I am really concerned about losing this nice sight of beautiful houses. However, to a certain extent, we are to accept the urban explosion being experienced by every big city of the countries.

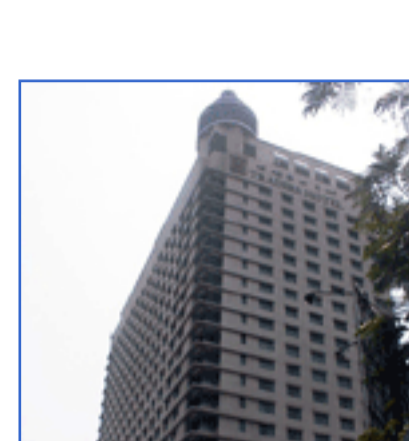
Whenever I see the remaining limited number of bungalows, I can't stop myself thinking about the possibility of those bungalows replaced by high-rise buildings. Previously there will be a single family living in a single detached house. Now I am trying my best to envisage the future when many families live in many apartments. Those are not affordable to pay for high-rise buildings with elevators are to live at common eight-storied building. In the near future those who like to live in a detached house in a compound, satellite towns like Dagon Myo-thit and Hlaing Thaya will be their choice. However they need a car to avoid riding a public transport system bus for over an hour to reach downtown Yangon, feeling sweaty.

High-rise Yangon

Initiation of new high-rise building projects can be witnessed in 2003, in order to change Yangon City into a high-rise city in 2005. The fact was stated in Myanmar Times weekly publication. Those new high-rise buildings can be seen completed before the holding of ASEAN Summit at Yangon in 2006, as told by construction entrepreneurs.

Those high-rise building projects licensed by City Housing Project Supervising Committee

in 2003, are instructed to complete in 2006, as told by construction entrepreneurs.



You can't do engineering works without clear knowledge and vision. You must be precise.

Higher flats mean

"In constructing a building the first priority should be strength of the building, and the second point should be beauty. In our buildings there are around 60 families in each one. If it is not strong enough it would be really frightening. I don't dare to imagine about it. People casually said that they would build 15 storied or 16 storied building. Actually it is frightening. You can't do engineering works without clear knowledge and vision. You must be precise," remarked U Aung Zaw Win, Managing Director of Shine Construction Co Ltd, which is the contractor of 14-storied building facing Aung San Stadium at downtown Yangon.

Last November, Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt earnestly urged construction companies in Yangon to meet international standard in building.

Quality is more important for high-rise building than for factories. Concerning factories rapidity is the key factor for proprietors, but in building high-rise having not enough strength in a single floor could make problems for higher floors, as commented by U Kyaw Lin, Director, Zaykabar Construction Co Ltd.

Construction companies have enough experience in building nine-storied ones, though they still need more experience related to 20-storied buildings. That is the fact expressed by construction entrepreneurs. Most of the high-rise building construction projects licensed in 2003 are to realize building with 20-stories and higher, as written in a weekly news publication released in early 2003.

Some building contractors have hired foreign technicians for building with more than 20 floors. Anyhow most of the contractors rely on local technicians, as told by a member of high-rise building supervisory body, formed with technical experts.

We need inspection

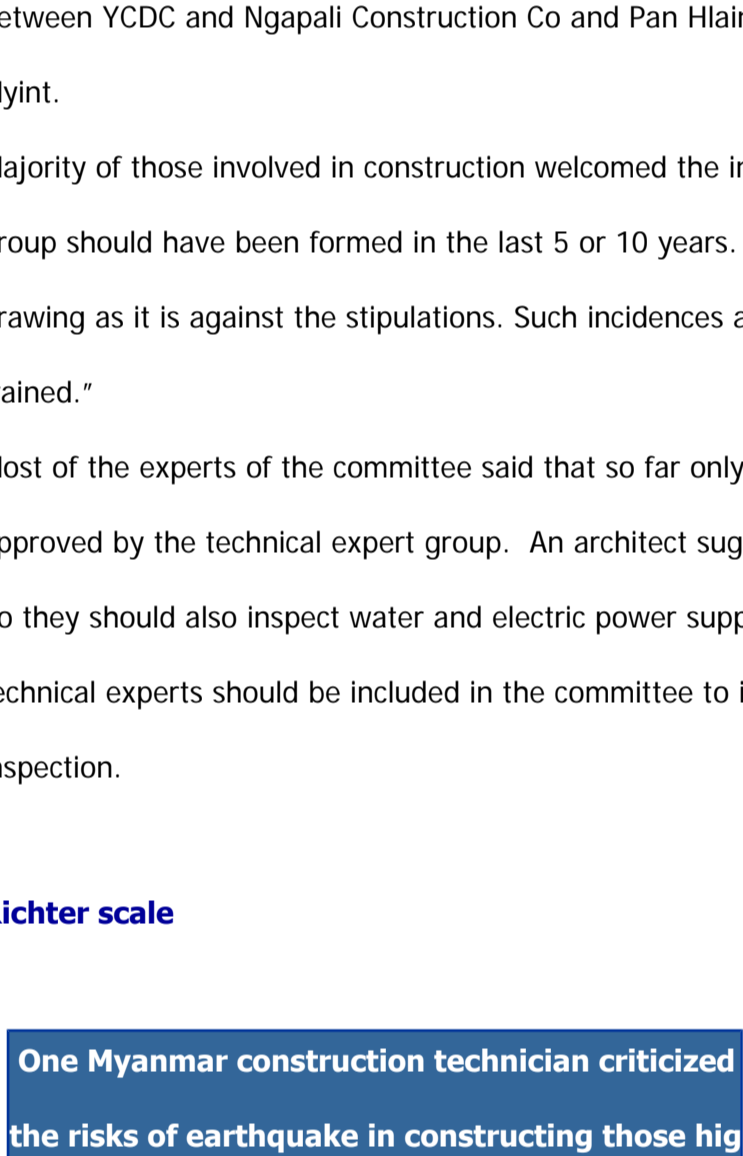
Under the guidance of General Khin Nyunt, the Prime Minister of Myanmar, High-rise Building Supervisory Committee was formed in August 2003. Deputy Minister U Nyi Hla Nge of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) led the 10-member expert group. The buildings with nine floors and higher will be assumed as high-rise buildings to be inspected by the committee. The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) and the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development handed over their responsibilities to the committee.

U Than Myint, Secretary of the committee explained that the committee will not inspect the high-rise buildings, which have already been built before August 2003, but those projects started after the time. Currently 23 buildings under construction are to undergo inspection. They are Shwe Asia Tower of Asia Express Co, Hledan Centre of Asia World Co, Shwe Hintha Tower of Universal Co, Grand Golden View Tower of Dagon International Co, Bo Sun Pet Condo of Naing Industry Co, Shin Saw Pu Tower of Sakura Co, construction of No 2 Middle School of Pazuntaung Township by Shwegabar Maung Maung Co, Pyi Garden of Zaykabar Co, Kabaaye Condominium of a JV between YCDC and Gamone Pwint Co, the Royal Tower of the Central Development Group, Pazun-taung Twin Tower of Shwe Thanlwin Co, Mawtin Tower of Olympic Co, a construction project to be realized by Fortune International Co at Min Dhamma Road, Airport View Tower of Shwe Pyi Thit Co, an office tower of Aung Than Win Co, Shine Tower (9, 10) of Shine Construction Co, Sony Tower of TMW Co, Wut Yi High-rise Building Project of Taw Win Family Co, U Maung Maung Gyi construction project, Shwe Mya Tha Advanced Housing of a JV between YCDC and Ngapali Construction Co and Pan Hlaing Nyer of Ye Tagun Construction Co. It was revealed by U Than Myint.

Majority of those involved in construction welcomed the inspection body of experts. One of them remarked: "Such expert group should have been formed in the last 5 or 10 years. When we present our drawing to the group we got to revise the drawing as it is against the stipulations. Such incidences are growing, but it is good for us. We became experienced and trained."

Most of the experts of the committee said that so far only the construction site of Kabaaye Condominium is satisfactorily approved by the technical expert group. An architect suggested that the committee is focusing on the design of buildings. So they should also inspect water and electric power supply system. The person continued to say positively that more technical experts should be included in the committee to inspect other sectors as well leading to more comprehensive inspection.

Richter scale



"Prevention of earthquake is the main cause of emergence of our inspection committee," said U Than Myint, the secretary of the committee. Only a few of the construction contractors are aware of the risks of earthquake. Myanmar is located on Sagaing earthquake core (?) where earthquake of high Richter scale may happen, warned a Japanese earthquake expert while visiting Myanmar in February 2004.

Earthquake map written by Myanmar Earthquake Engineering Committee, and creation of earthquake symbols and codes will be completed in a near future, U Than Myint carried on his explanation.

One Myanmar construction technician criticized that there were few considerations about prevention of the risks of earthquake in constructing those high-rise buildings, finished before the formation of the inspection group.

From theory to practice

Appearance of high-rise building projects offers the chance to convert theories including prevention of the risks of earthquake into practice. U Khaing Win Latt, an architect of Pan Hlaing Tower admitted, "Due to emergence of high-rise buildings, we got to realize theories practically. That makes us experienced."

U Khaing Win Latt, who created façade of the MICT Park in Yangon, continued, "Myanmar architects will face no problems in building up to 20 floors. However they may have problems to construct 30-40 floor buildings." In Myanmar we have enough architects who are ready to draw designs for high-rise buildings, another Myanmar architect made a supporting remark.

A responsible person of the supervisory group honoured Myanmar architects by saying that after comparing those architectural works inspected, he concluded that foreign technicians' architectural works are not much better than those of their Myanmar counterparts, except more tidiness due to better experience.

To lift you

"It is important to consider the capacity, speed, and number of elevators to be installed in a building. You can't put anything additional, once the building was completed. That's why you need to cooperate with the architects," explained U Nay Oo, an officer-in-charge of an elevator sales company, about relation between architects and elevator installation.

Due to possible growth of high-rise buildings sales of elevators will rise, remarked U Nyi Nyi Win, Assistant General Manager of Myanmar Jadine Schindler.

Sales of elevators grow again in this year as told by Fortune International Co Ltd's elevator sales manager U Nyi Nyi Win. The prices are not stable and vary on market demand, he continued his remark.

"If we don't have enough local engineers to install at growing high-rise buildings, we can call in engineers from our branch offices at Vietnam and Singapore," U Nay Oo proudly revealed their company's human resources strength.

Out of seven elevator companies Myanmar Jadine Schindler Co is the only foreign branch office at Yangon under the direct supervision of principal company at Switzerland. Others are just agent companies, U Nyi Nyi Oo revealed. In order to prevent risks out of power failure, he installed generators and technology to stop the elevator at nearest level-entrance. It was explained by U Nyi Nyi Win to express the suitability of his elevators in Myanmar.

Efficiency of elevators is rising though residents of high-rise buildings are still facing inconvenience. Some of them are disproportion of passengers and number of elevators, restriction on carrying gas cylinders and other heavy materials, and power failure which stop the running elevators.

Interrelationship

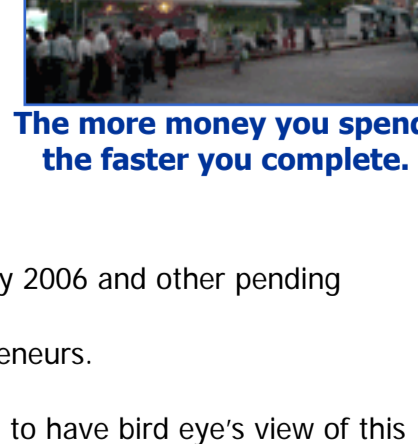
Businesses interrelated to construction are piling, pre-mixed concrete production, soil strength testing etc. Increasing number of high-rise buildings lead to growing number of piling companies, commented construction contractors circle. Currently there are only a few piling companies in Myanmar causing difficulties, said construction entrepreneurs.

They also expressed that nine pre-mixed concrete producers are not enough for building high-rise. Soil-strength test is the first and the most important activity in building high-rise. So far eight construction companies were registered at the Supervisory Committee.

To prevent slanting of piles due to earthquake, soil test should be made systematically. The fact became more widely known among construction entrepreneurs, said U Nyunt Oo of UNO Co. The cost of soil test is comparatively cheaper in Myanmar than other countries around the world. The quality of test can be compared to that of other South East Asian countries except Singapore and Malaysia, he reviewed.

--- is none other than Money!

"We need capital. The more money you spend, the faster you complete," Daw Hla Myint of Pinlon Hteik Htar Construction Co Ltd highlighted the critical role of capital in the industry. Money is critical in completion of a building within a time limit. Her company normally finished construction of a 12-storied building within one and a half-year's time. Spending more money lead to completion in a shorter time, Daw Hla Myint continued.



The more money you spend, the faster you complete.

Licenses of those housing projects stipulated by the Housing Committee to be completed by 2006 and other pending housing projects will be revoked and newly assigned to other efficient construction entrepreneurs.

"My home is quite calm, but I like to breathe fresh air while enjoying scenic Inya Lake, and to have bird eye's view of this city. That's why I opened my office here," one businessman shared his feeling on opening his office at Inya View Condominium. Contrary to other high-rise buildings in Yangon, Inya View charged higher rental for apartments at higher floors. She used to take rest at her flats at Pearl Condominium, as her downtown house makes her annoyed, as told by a rich lady.

Some buyers are well-off persons who really want to live at the apartments, while some others think of a flat as merchandise for trading. "Realty market never collapses totally, like car market. You may have lesser profit, or you have to keep merchandise unsold for a long time. That's why those people with enough capital still buying houses and flats," a responsible person of Shwe San Ein Realty Agency explained.

Only a select few are buying many condominiums in Yangon? Each and everyone needs to contribute in creating better future of high-rise buildings in Yangon.

It would be joyful if we could replace peaceful bungalows with resident-filled tall high-rise buildings.

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"There are also Myanmar technicians who meet international standard"

Zayar Ohn

Photo:Myint Zaw Aung



Sule pagoda

Myanmar should be proud of Ko Sann Oo who could be labeled as the export of this country. He is an architect who drew the designs such as Sule pagoda and Martyrs' Mausoleum. The leaders from Malaysia and Thailand could not help but recognize the works of Ko San Oo in their countries. Below are the excerpts from the interview:

Why do you come back to Myanmar when you could work in abroad?

It's really convenient to live there. Financially or the status I enjoyed at work. I have drawn many plans. But, when I think about the construction of the buildings, in my country, of which I could prepare the designs, I came back.

Can you explain about the international norms in building the high-rise buildings?

They have complete team work. The developer, the consultant engineer and the building contractors fully cooperated with each other. Then, the architect, the structure engineer, the sanitary engineer, the mechanical engineer and the electrical engineer need to work together and cooperate. And they need to be given responsibility.

Does one need to include all of them?

If the building is the average one, mostly undertaken by the local contractors it could be built by referring from the plan. But, if we are talking about the high-rise building, all the engineers I have mentioned should participate.

Do the developers here know about it?

They are usually profit oriented. I don't say it's wrong. But, they need to have the idea to hire these technicians out of the profit.

Among the engineers you mentioned, who is the most important?

All are important. But, the architect is responsible to check if the construction work is as per his plan. That is why he is the principal among all the engineers involved in that construction work. However, the role of architect here is not significant.

What's your opinion of the high-rise apt here?

Who has thought about how to clean the outside of the windows? In abroad, they even take care in drawing the design of the balcony. A ball point pen might drop off from the high above and hit the passerby to death.

Does Myanmar have sufficient technicians to build the high-rise buildings?

Generally speaking, yes. There are technicians like me who gained experience from abroad. There are even quantity surveyors who could systematically compile the materials needed. What we need to do is to utilize their expertise.

Are the technicians here paid as they are worth?

No, including me. Only after the responsible persons started to give priority to quality, we are paid more to some extent. But, not as much as the input we have provided.

Does the income gap occur due to being a local and being a foreigner? Or is it due to the performance gap?

I feel bad because Myanmar people are overly impressive with the foreigners. Among Myanmar technicians, there are some if not many who match international standard. If you hire the foreigner, it's difficult to discuss with him but quite easy with our own people. And the service charges will be more reasonable. If the locals are paid twice, they will work more than two times. The design drawn by the foreigners could not be used exactly as per plan. For example, the condition of brick is different between abroad and here.

What do you think of the emergence of the Supervisory Committee to check the quality of the high-rise building?

I heartily welcome them. But, rather than emphasizing on the structure, it should inspect more comprehensively. It's only then, we will realize that we need to utilize the technicians. The inspection should include public safety factor other than the tendency to collapse.

How do you charge for the design?

At a fixed rate or by percentage. Here, there is no standardized system so I am flexible in charging. For example (pointing at the photo of the building) I charged the amount of Kyat XXX.

Are you considered expensive?

The developer paid that sum. To achieve a valuable house on the valuable plot, one needs to pay the technician what he is worth.

Do we need high rise buildings?




Yes, we do. According to the population, economic needs, and terrain, we need high- rise buildings. Even if we do not take these norm into consideration, we will need to show the high-rise buildings as the characteristic of the capital city.

Do the civil engineers only draw the building plans?

Any one can draw it. But, for high-rise buildings, the architect needs to sign the building plan to get the approval of the Supervisory Committee.

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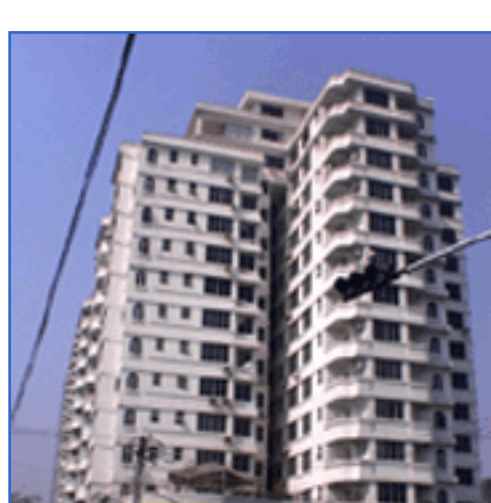


"What the resident said about her condominium"

Myint Zaw Aung

Photo:Myint Zaw Aung

When we talk about condominium, we should also talk about the residents, other than the contractors and the engineers, to get a complete picture. So we interviewed Daw Si Si who is living in the twelfth floor at Pearl condominium.



Pearl Condominium

How long have you been here?

Just three months.

Why do you buy it?

It's not that I like it much but I think it will be convenient to live here. Partly as saving money.

Is the apartment you get, the same as what the company has advertised?

A lot differ. When we paid the deposit, it promised to provide the labor. But they did not. We hired the labor at own cost. There are still many things to do.

Where do you live before moving in?

In a bungalow at Minagalar Taung Nyunt.

What is the difference between that bungalow and this condo?

When I moved in, I felt like I was in Singapore or abroad, when I looked through the window. I thought that it would be less dusty as we would live high above. In reality, the higher the apartment is, the more dust you get. If someone on the ground burns the refuse, the ash gets into your condo. If you open the door, the mosquitoes come in. The traffic on the road is really noisy. I prefer the bungalow.

Is the elevator convenient?

If there is a black out, we have only one elevator operating. So we need to wait if there are a lot of users. But, if there is electricity, two elevators operates. Then, it's OK. When we moved in, we were not allowed to use the elevator to move up the heavy stuff. So we had to pay tea money to the elevator operator. After paying him two times, we complained that it was expensive to move in. Then, we were allowed to use the elevator.

Who pay for the painting of the building?

Don't know. So far no paint-work after we moved in.

Do you intend to live long here?

No. I would rather live in the bungalow. I have found one already.

Then, will you sell this condo when you move out?

Not yet. I will keep it.

"Then, we interviewed Daw Nyein Nyein who lives in Yuzana Tower at the corner of Bagayar and Shin Saw Pu street."



Yuzana Tower

How long have you been here?

Two years.

And before that?

First floor at FMI (Hlaing Thar Yar).

Why do you move in?

I like the surrounding. I can pay respect to Shwe Dagon from here. Fresh air also. The children's school is quite close so it's convenient.

Which apartment do you prefer? The old one or this one?

This one.

How much did this apartment cost when you buy? And how much it's worth now?

I got it at Kyat 9.8 million. Currently sellers want about Kyat 60 million.

Is living here convenient as you have expected?

Yes. But, we have to do the cleaning of the building ourselves that is not what we have been promised. And the janitors do not work hard.

If the elevator convenient?

If there is a black out, the elevator is operated by the generator. We have an understanding to let us carry the heavy stuff with the elevator. But, if they are too heavy, we have to use the stairs.

Is it safe to live in high rise apt?

I get worried only during the monsoon. This building stands alone in the field so if the wind is strong, the sound of the wind blowing is scary.

Do you have any plan to sell it?

I intend to live here permanently.

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