

Prison holds fond memories

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Former D-G hopes part of wall will be retained

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PETALING JAYA: Former Prisons Department director-general Datuk Zaman Khan has fond memories of Pudu Prison despite its notoriety as the country's foremost prison at one time.

Zaman said his connection to the prison existed even before he was made Prisons Department director-general, a post which he held between 1994 and 1997.

"I grew up in Kelantan. During that time, we had to do Form Six in schools on the west coast. I remembered that when I was transferred to Victoria Institution, I had to stay at a hostel near Stadium Negara.

"We used to be directed by the prison authorities to play sports like volleyball and football with the prisoners. I used to play volleyball with them," he said.

Zaman, who was also recalled from a conference in Singapore to lead a crack team to end a six-day hostage crisis in Pudu Prison in 1986, said he was just then seconded to the department.

"Of course, I had to be involved in ending the drama," he said.

The drama which saw two doctors Dr Radzi Jaafar and Dr Abdul Aziz Abdul Majid being held hostage

in a clinic by six remand prisoners led by Jimmy Chuah, ended without bloodshed.

However, despite having come face to face with such crises at the prison, Zaman said he was still sad to know that the whole complex would be disappearing.

"We should leave the wall facing the police headquarters in Jalan Hang Tuah and the gate. It can be made part of a historic tour.

"There is nothing to be ashamed about to let our future generations know that a prison once stood here. I know the land is a very expensive and sizeable piece of real estate, and it is not possible to keep this intact.

"I feel sad that there are people who want to tear down the wall," said Zaman, who is now the Malaysian AIDS Council president.

The 394m-long wall of the prison was being demolished to make way for a road-widening project, including the construction of an underpass.

The rest of the prison, which sits amid flourishing development in the Bukit Bintang's Golden Triangle, will remain for now, but the site has been earmarked for a mega development project by UDA Holdings.

The prison, which once held notorious gangster Botak Chin, was fully

FROM CELL TO MALL

HISTORY

- > Built in 1895 by the the British colonial administration for RM138,000 with material from India and Britain.
- > First Governor – Lt-Kol J.A.B. Ellen.
- > Located in Jalan Hang Tuah, Kuala Lumpur next to Berjaya Times Square shopping complex and Kuala Lumpur Police Headquarters.
- > Called Pudoah Gaol at one point.
- > Originally contained 240 cells on three floors to hold 900 convicts.

EXECUTIONS

1960-1993: 180 convicts executed during this period.

Among them are:

1949: Communist underground Japanese resistance leader S.A. Ganapathy hanged for firearm possession.

1981: Infamous armed gang leader Wong Swee Chin aka Botak Chin.

1986: Australians Kevin Barlow and Brian Chambers executed for heroin trafficking.

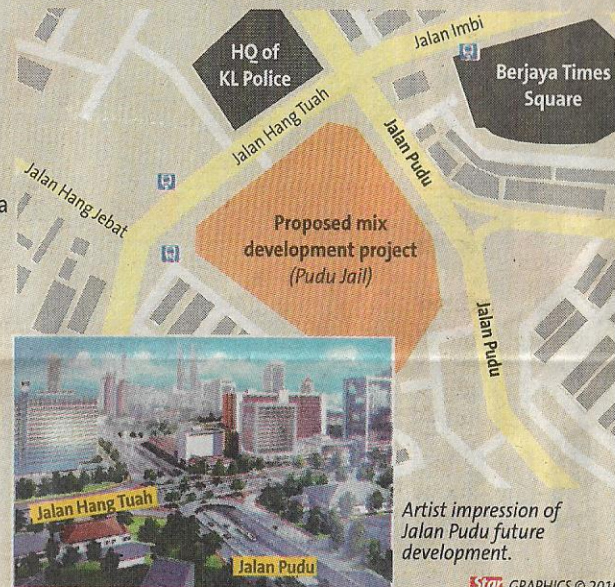
1989: British citizen Derrick Gregory hanged for heroin trafficking.

1993: Last execution.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

- > A mixed development project will comprise transit centres, service apartments, offices, recreational centres, hotels and business lots.
- > Allocation of land: 40% for residential units; 60% for a commercial hub.
- > Construction is scheduled to start in stages from first quarter of 2011 over the next 10 years.

- > Held 6,550 convicts in 1985, the most number in its lifespan. Convicts slept in shifts during this time.
- > Closed on Nov 1, 1996. 1,585 of the last inmates moved to Sungai Buloh prison.
- > Briefly reopened as a tourist attraction in 1997.
- > Former inmate Khong Yen Chong drew the world's longest mural on its outer walls (384m long and 4.5m high) – an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.



Artist impression of Jalan Pudu future development.

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completed in 1895. It stopped operating in 1996 after the prison was relocated to Sungai Buloh.

Zaman said he saw no reason why part of the wall should not be

retained as there were other buildings like the A Famosa and the Stadthuys which had been preserved as historical landmarks in Malacca.

"These buildings are reminders

that we were once colonised by the Portuguese and the Dutch. So why should we feel disgraced that there was once a prison in Pudu?" he said.