

REAL ESTATE MAGNATE TRANSFORMS LIVES

BY GWENDOLINE SIM

From building his company to helping the less fortunate, Tan Sri SP Lim of the Titijaya Group, takes it all in his stride.

Tan Sri SP Lim, Chairman, Founder and Group Managing Director of the Titijaya Group, believes in the transformative power of the young. He should know, when he made his first million from it.

He believes so much in the dynamism of the youth that he has even built his business around it, and today, the Titijaya Group is one of the leading property developers in Malaysia, with around RM900 million worth of homes.

"We do developments in areas that are more easily accessible by transport, that are convenient for young people. Our strengths lie in doing businesses that cater to young people," Lim said.

With a proven track record, the Titijaya Group is now highly regarded as an innovative, resource and reputable property developer, responsible for many successful developments in the most sought after growth areas.

The Klang-based has in recent years, embarked on six projects in Subang Jaya with a combined gross development value (GDV) of MYR1.12 billion. It is spreading its wings to Sabah, where it will be undertaking three major ventures: First Palm City Centre in Lahad Datu and two projects in Kota Kinabalu; with the GDV of these three projects estimated to be more than MYR1 billion.

Constantly endeavouring for distinctive excellence, the properties developed by the group are usually

aesthetically conceptualised with an elegant landscaping, with a basis on a modern and contemporary lifestyle. These details are manifested in some of the group's ongoing and upcoming projects. Currently, the group is developing Subang Park Homes, a 10-acre condominium project in Subang, Jaya.

Building a fortune

Lim started his business in 1984, with a small construction sub-contracting outfit, which he has now developed into a property development company. A self-made man, he made his first million at the young age of 28, from the building of a holiday home in the hill resort town of Fraser's Hill in Pahang, Malaysia.

From a small player in the market, Titijaya has become one of the prime property groups in the industry, and is well known for their quality projects that are built and handed over ahead of schedule, enabling their clients to gain faster capital appreciation as well as savings. Their portfolio now includes duplex living, office suites and towers, housing communities and apartments, business centres, hotels, shops and mixed development projects.

"I learned the property market on my own. I achieved my success by starting at a young age, and worked step by step. I earned the most money in 1998, during the financial crisis. From then on, things kept going up for me," he said.

What sets Titijaya apart from the other property developers in Malaysia is Titijaya's focus, which is more small-scale. "They do more big-scale developments. We focus on areas that are more easily accessed by transport, for example, areas near train stations, like Klang, a location which is near a train station," he said.

Developing the less fortunate

Known for his generous donations to schools and welfare bodies, Lim donated MYR2.5 million to several charitable organisations when his only son, Lim Poh Yit got married in 2010. That same year, he was awarded the title of the *Best Philanthropic Private Developer* at the inaugural NST Property – SC Cheah Choice Awards.

"I won the best philanthropic award as when we built facilities, we don't charge for it, we let the public use it. For example, schools, bus stops. This is our way of giving back to the society," Lim said.

Recently, he was made executive advisor of the Federation of Malaysian Lim Associations, and was made in-charge of a low interest loan scheme, to help low income Malaysian Chinese women. The first batch of MYR30 million loans (an estimated sum of USD9,979,010 is to be issued to these women during the first half of this year. He also stated that a centre for entrepreneurial studies has been established to help these women start their own businesses.





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By helping these women, who would normally not be able to achieve their business aspirations due to their limited finances, Lim believes that the Malaysian government will realise its goal of getting 35 – 40% of Malaysian women employed by 2020. His empathy with these women stems from having grown up poor himself, and he feels that a person's wealth should be used for the betterment of society.

"Being wealthy is a God-given blessing; I knew how it was like being poor, I know what help the poor needs and I try to help them as much as I can," he said. Lim left home to fend for himself when he was barely in his teens as his large family just could not feed him.

Recognising the importance of the mother's role in the development of a child, Lim felt that it was paramount to help the mother first, in order to aid the child.

He says earnestly, "The problems of the poor are quite serious. There are an estimated 100,000 single mothers in Malaysia. Figures from a study show that 30% of these mothers don't know who fathered their children. These mothers tend to be young, around 16, 17 years old, who come from rural villages. They engage in casual sex, get pregnant, and their partners run off, leaving them alone to fend for themselves."

"A lot of people are focusing on education causes, but they don't recognise that when you concentrate on education, you also have to see how the child's mother is faring. If the mother is poor, she is not going to care about her child's education," he said.

It is here the Malaysian Chinese Women's Entrepreneur Foundation comes into play, assisting Chinese women in

straitened circumstances to achieve their business dreams and aim for some economic freedom for themselves and their families.

"It's not practical to just give money to the mother; it's not going to work. Without any money, she may pull her child out of school early, and have them work at an early age. When these children enter society at a young age, they may land in bad company. If we do not break this poverty cycle, it will continue to exacerbate the current problems in society," he explained.

"The main thing is to help the mothers first, before you can help her children and the next generation, and also help the child's education. You don't start from solely educating the child; you need to do more than just that. When the mother is poor, how is she going to feed and support her child and family?" he added with conviction.

Women's issues will be their current priority, as "these women need help, they need a voice for them."

"If a poor person was to talk about his business ideas and plans with someone, would anyone believe him? He has no capital; it's going to be very difficult to even start. It's always the hardest at the beginning. When we set up this scheme, the banks showed interest and sought us out for talks. How the scheme works is these women need to have had started their businesses first, and need to have a trusted record; when they approach us for help, we'll lend them the necessary funds."

A committed philanthropist, Lim's pursues charity work outside of his work. "I'm now working on this women's charity, it's a community charity," he said.

Family as a bedrock

His children, Poh Yit, and Charmaine, are both involved in the family business, with his son being Titijaya's CEO and his daughter, the group's director. His children have already expressed an interest in doing development, he said.

"I see it as a way of expanding my company. Previously, if I were doing it on my own, I wouldn't do it that big. My children have an interest in the business, so we will expand the business."

A father who believes in letting children learn from experience, he says, "We have to let go a little and let the children take the lead, then we will be able to bring the business further and bigger. We have to move a little to the sidelines."

"I let them have a deciding hand in a lot of matters; I don't want to oversee them. If you don't let go of the leash and let them do it, they won't be able to learn anything. We'll see the outcome of the matters when the decision has been made, if they make a mistake, I'll take a look at it. Through this, I can see if they can handle it or not. When they (my children) are used to making such decisions in the business, then they will take initiative and be independent. However if you grasp them tightly and do not give them leeway, they won't be able to grow up. Around 50-60% of my business has already been relinquished to their control."

"I've told them many times, "You decide. When you've decided what to do, I'll take a look at it," he said. He is open to having his children follow their own dreams, however, to him, "this business will always be a rock, a firm foundation for them." 🏡