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THE impending redevelopment of Kampung Baru, which is located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, will be one of the most challenging urban regeneration projects by the Government.

A source from a local council says: "The redevelopment of Kampung Baru is potentially going to be the most problematic, but it will also be one of the most ambitious ones ever undertaken by the Government by virtue of one single factor – multiple ownership of land."

While two other prime ministers had toyed with the idea, it is only under Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak that a Kampung Baru Development Corp Bill was drafted by the Attorney-General's office. The bill was first tabled last year in Parliament and according to Senator Datuk Abdul Rahim Rahman, who is also the executive chairman of Rahim & Co group of companies, it will most certainly be debated in the September Parliament session.

"There are certain misconceptions that need to be cleared. The first is that many assume the Government is going to buy up the whole 200 over acres. The Government is not going to do that. The Government will not use the Land Acquisition Act 1960. The redevelopment exercise will be through negotiations and will be counting on the rapport with the owners.

"The Government will spearhead the development through joint ventures. Developers and government-linked corporations are going to help finance the development and the landowners can be the shareholders.

"The second misconception is that the Government will force the owners to sell. This is not true. Landowners will be given the incentive to enter into joint ventures with developers to develop the place.

"The third misconception is that, once the bill is passed, gazetted and becomes law – and this will take time – the bulldozers are going to come in the very next day. This is not true. The redevelopment plan is a long-term one and will be carried out with the concurrence of the land owners," says Rahim.

He does not believe the Land Acquisition Act should be used because this may create a lot of objections. However, there may be certain instances when the Government may have to acquire the land, as when roads are widened, and this may involve 10 houses or so.

"In cases like this, the government will compensate for this land and pay the market value," says Rahim.

Rahim says the greatest challenge facing the regeneration of Kampung Baru is the issue of multiple ownership where one title has owners that go back three to four generations.

"This may mean that as many as 40 people have ownership of a piece of land that is between 10,000 sq ft and 20,000 sq ft – the average size of the land there. It is too small to be developed on its own, so the land has to be amalgamated. That is why the Government has to come in with the political will to develop it."

As for the actual physical development, the first step is to provide the infrastructure like wider roads. That means the drawing up of a master plan, says Rahim.

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Land dilemma: The redevelopment of Kampung Baru (beneath the KL city skyline) is potentially a very problematic one due to multiple ownership of land.

Regeneration challenge

Kampung Baru redevelopment - an ambitious project



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Parliament, Rahim says generally all agree that Kampung Baru should be redeveloped.

Kampung Baru took shape in late 19th century on 227 acres next to the Klang River just outside Kuala Lumpur. It was one of the projects by the British administration.

The main objective was to provide a place near the town centre where the Malays could live. By Jan 12, 1900, the Selangor Resident gazetted the area as Malay Agricultural Settlement. Rules were drawn up by the Resident under the

Land Enactment 1887 to manage the area and to keep the settlement entirely Malay.

Over the years, the population grew and along this growth, land ownership became increasingly fragmented. From a purely agricultural settlement where land is accounted for in terms of lots, there are today strata titles because low-rise and high-rise structures exist together with traditional Malay houses.

Because Kampung Baru is located on Malay Reserved Land, non-

Malays are not allowed to buy land, rent or to live there.

For multi-cultural Malaysia, urbanisation along cultural lines is a near impossibility, as Rahim explains, with examples from Penang and Singapore. What is important is meeting the social-cultural needs of the community.

Below are excerpts of a question and answer with Rahim:

As a senator as well as a property man, how do you think the redevelopment of Kampung Baru – which can be emotional – should be handled? The people sacrificing for the country, or the country taking a people-oriented and social stand?

We need to be very clear on the objective of the redevelopment. This should be conveyed clearly to the people of Kampung Baru. It should not be considered as "the people sacrificing for the country" as they are not in a position to be sacrificed. The redevelopment plan should take into account not only economic benefits, but also its social implications and overall impact.

Redevelopment involving relocation has not been easy in Malaysia, learning from the Penang government's efforts to redevelop Penang Clan Jetties in Weld Quay (a collection of Chinese water villages) in mid-2000.

Based on a study conducted for this area, several villages were recommended to be redeveloped into commercial development and the residents were to be relocated to an identified location, and several other villages were recommended to be maintained as traditional

floating villages but with improved infrastructure and beautification work.

The redevelopment and relocation plans were rejected by the residents, the main reason being (they) wanted to maintain cultural diversity of the clans. As for the beautification plan for the other villages, that was well-received by the residents of the villages. Until today, the plan is still under review.

What can we learn from Singapore's renewal programmes and preservation of cultural or historical sites?

In the case of Kampong Glam (in Singapore), it was gazetted as a conservation area by the Urban Redevelopment Authority. Some of the conserved sites in Kampong Glam include the Sultan Mosque, the Hajjah Fatimah Mosque and the Istana Kampong Glam, the palace of the former sultan.

Today, after the redevelopment, Kampong Glam retains strong ties with the ethnic-Malay and Muslim community. It is sometimes referred to as the Muslim Quarter due to its history. The Muslim population still remains a significant presence in Kampong Glam and the area remains a centre for Muslim activities. The Sultan Mosque remains a major landmark and congregation point for Singaporean Muslims.

Both experiences in Penang and Kampong Glam show that any redevelopment plan needs to take into account the socio-cultural impact on the settlers. If the plan maintains the culture or identity of the original community, it might be well received.