AGRICULTURE

Vertical farming looking up

I READ with interest the cover story of the *RED* pullout on vertical farming (NST, March 28) and it's good to know that we are not lagging behind in this field.

Apart from Professor Dr Norhati Ibrahim, a lecturer at the Centre of Studies for Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Mara, conducting a study on vertical farming, various projects and activities related to it have been carried out in Malaysia for years.

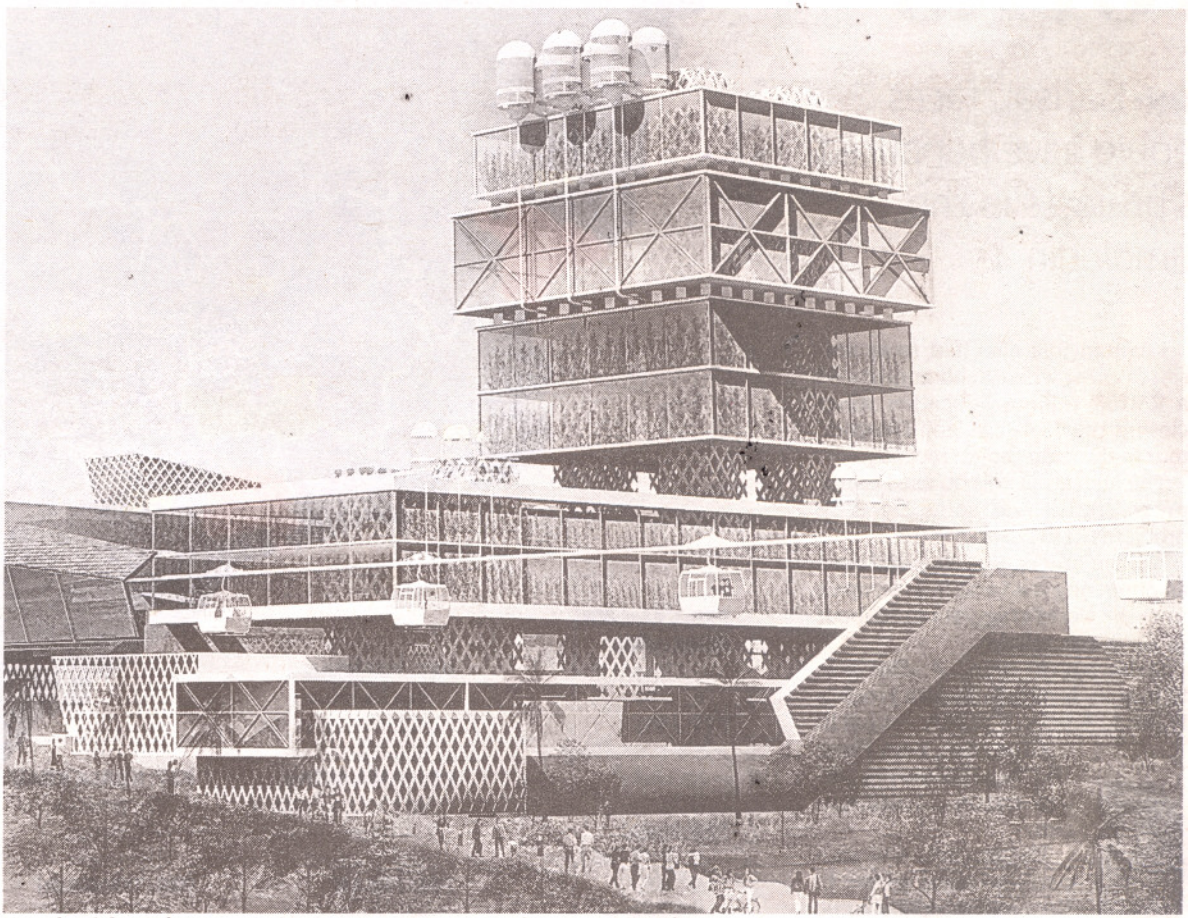
The premise for vertical farming is that instead of farming on land (traditional horizontal farming), we can produce large-scale agricultural crops such as fruits and vegetables and livestock such as swiftlet and fish farming in multi-storey buildings.

We cannot discount the possibility of venturing into vertical farming in Malaysia, which can help the country expand food production.

When Tan Sri Sanusi Junid served as agriculture minister (1986), he had experimented with growing rice on rooftops of buildings, but it was considered impractical then. Today, with advances in science and technology, vertical farming can be done without much difficulty.

The advances in agricultural science and technology have provided opportunities for urban dwellers to undertake hydroponic agriculture in limited space.

I attended an agricultural exhibition recently and was attracted by plant factories designed by the technical teams of Universiti Putra Malaysia, where vegetables are cultivated through the fish tank hydroponic method.



Vertical farming *can help the country expand* ***food production****.*

The plant factory, measuring 2x2m by 1m, costs RM300.

If properly managed, it can yield RM60 worth of vegetables a week.

The plant gets nutrients from the water pumped out of the tank, in which fish are reared.

The water supplied to the plant is re-circulated to the fish tank to provide food for the fish.

This system is environmentally friendly and does not cost a lot or require much space.

It is a great idea to encourage city folk to plant vegetables using this method. They can do this to supplement their income, besides being a leisure activity.

We should also look at expanding the swiftlet farming industry, which contributes about RM1 billion to the national income.

The number is expected to increase to RM5 billion by 2015.

Our venture into the bird's nest industry began in the late 1990s. There are now more than 8,000 swiftlet farm owners operating 40,000 swiftlet houses nationwide.

Shouldn't the success of the bird's nests industry be copied?

It should spur us to develop other agriculture sectors such as in-house farming on a large scale to enable us to export vegetables to the Middle East, which imports most of its food and drink from the United States, Pakistan and Austria.

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