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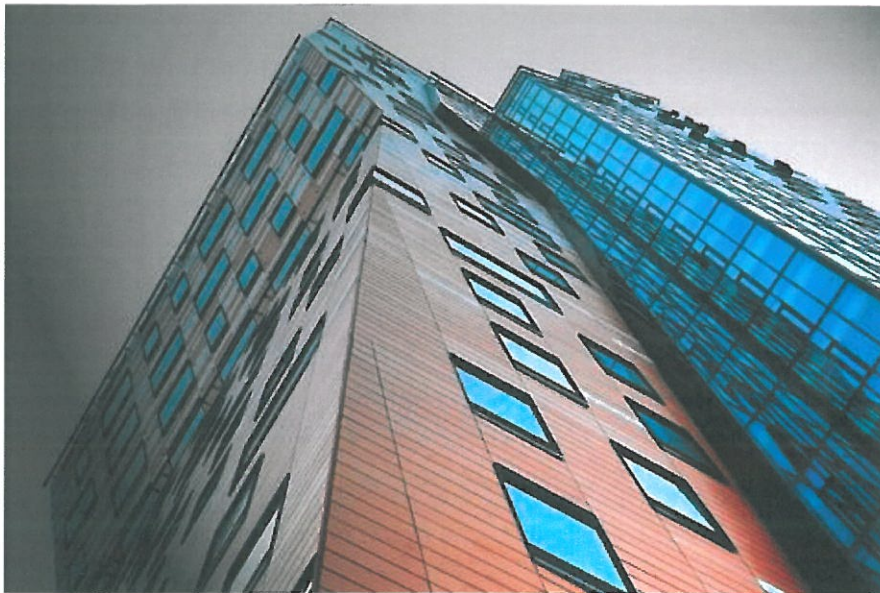
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Brno reaching for the skies

Country prepares for its tallest skyscraper to open within the next few weeks

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Courtesy Photo

The Czech Republic's second-largest city will soon lay claim to the primacy of having the country's tallest building as the construction of 111-meter tall AZ Tower nears its final stages.

Located in Brno's fledgling business district, the new skyscraper will have 30 stories and offer 17,000 square meters for sale or rent, to be used for luxury apartments, offices and shops. Two underground floors will hold 272 parking places.

"We are finalizing work in the interiors - floors, pavements, etc. - for the final inspection," says Petr Teplý from the Property company, which is one of the investors in the project. The inspection is planned for April 30, after which renters and owners will be permitted to move in, he added. The project has faced legal matters that delayed it by three years. After obtaining the necessary permits, developers completed construction in two years.

The AZ Tower's architects emphasized sustainable energy use. The building will generate its own solar power as well as modern technologies such as steel energy piles, which collect heat from the ground. The building will also have special hybrid ventilation, making use of natural air movement. The name of the building comes from its visual appearance. It consists of three connected blocks whose shape is reminiscent of the letters A and Z.

"Of course, we don't think we will hold the primacy of the highest building in Czech Republic for a long time, but [it's] a very interesting technical piece," says architect Gustav Křivinka from the Burian-Křivinka atelier, which conceived the project. "We had to address a lot of different questions during the construction, which you don't come across in common civil engineering."

The new skyscraper is situated in the flight zone, so its height was limited by aviation regulations. It also presented an aesthetic issue for conservationists, who worried the building's size would destroy Brno's skyline. But Křivinka argues the building lies far enough from the historical city center that it would not disturb its traditional character.

"AZ Tower will become the new modern dominant of the South Center, which is already known as a Brno's Manhattan," said Brno Mayor Roman Onderka. "It will be special not just because of its height, but also because of its architecture and ... modern ecological technologies. ... This building will highlight the face of the southern part of the city, as well as the whole of Brno, and make it more attractive."

AZ Tower will exceed the current highest building in Czech Republic by 2 meters. Currently, the tallest functioning Czech skyscraper is the City Tower in Prague, at 109 meters. It was opened in 2009 and offers office and parking space in 27 above-ground and three underground floors. The main design of the latter was conceived by American architect Richard Meier, who has designed museums, galleries, libraries and many other buildings around the world.

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