

Unesco recognition for KL buildings unlikely to succeed, says don

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RENOWNED archaeologist Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr Siti Zuraina Abdul Majid said that any aspirations for the iconic Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad (BSAS) in Jalan Raja, Kuala Lumpur, and those in its surrounding area to secure a spot on Unesco's World Heritage List was unlikely to succeed.

According to Prof Siti Zuraina, a site must possess more than just a collection of historical buildings; it must embody a remarkable universal value significant to humanity worldwide.

She added that BSAS fell short in comparison to locations like George Town (Penang) and Melaka, which served as pivotal ports connecting the east and west along the Straits of Malacca, meeting one of Unesco's 10 criteria for inclusion to the list.

"What is lacking in BSAS compared to George Town and Melaka is their significance in the world.

"Both cities, as well as sites like Kinabalu Park, Mulu and Lenggong Valley, are significant to world history and to mankind with global historical and anthropological significance," she said.

For the record, Prof Siti Zuraina and her team discovered the 11,000-year-old Perak Man in Lenggong, Perak in the early 1990s.

The archaeological heritage of Lenggong Valley gained Unesco recognition in 2012.

Currently, Malaysia boasts four Unesco-designated sites: Gunung Mulu National Park, Kinabalu Park, the archaeological heritage of Lenggong Valley, and the historic cities of



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Melaka and George Town.

Prof Siti Zuraina, who is also a consultant for Unesco, said that the Jalan Raja precinct lacked the spatial extent and prestige of these established sites.

She advocates for prioritising the preservation of the buildings rather than pursuing Unesco recognition.

"To me personally, forget about going for Unesco, focus on preserving the buildings. My suggestion is for JWN (National Heritage Department) to get creative and seek private funding for the restoration of the buildings," she said.

"JWN should approach private companies and persuade them to adopt the buildings as a corporate social responsibility, and in return JWN can put their name on a plaque or something and supervise them," she said.

"This is what I proposed when I was the heritage commissioner, to overcome funding issues and help to lessen the government's burden."

This is not the first time that

a call has been made to increase Kuala Lumpur's chances of being recognised as a heritage site by Unesco.

In 2013, the then Deputy Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Muhammad Bakhtiar Wan Chik told *StarMetro* that a task force to study ways to enhance Kuala Lumpur's appeal for Unesco recognition would be established, with DBKL, JWN, the Federal Territories Ministry and Tourism Ministry included as members.

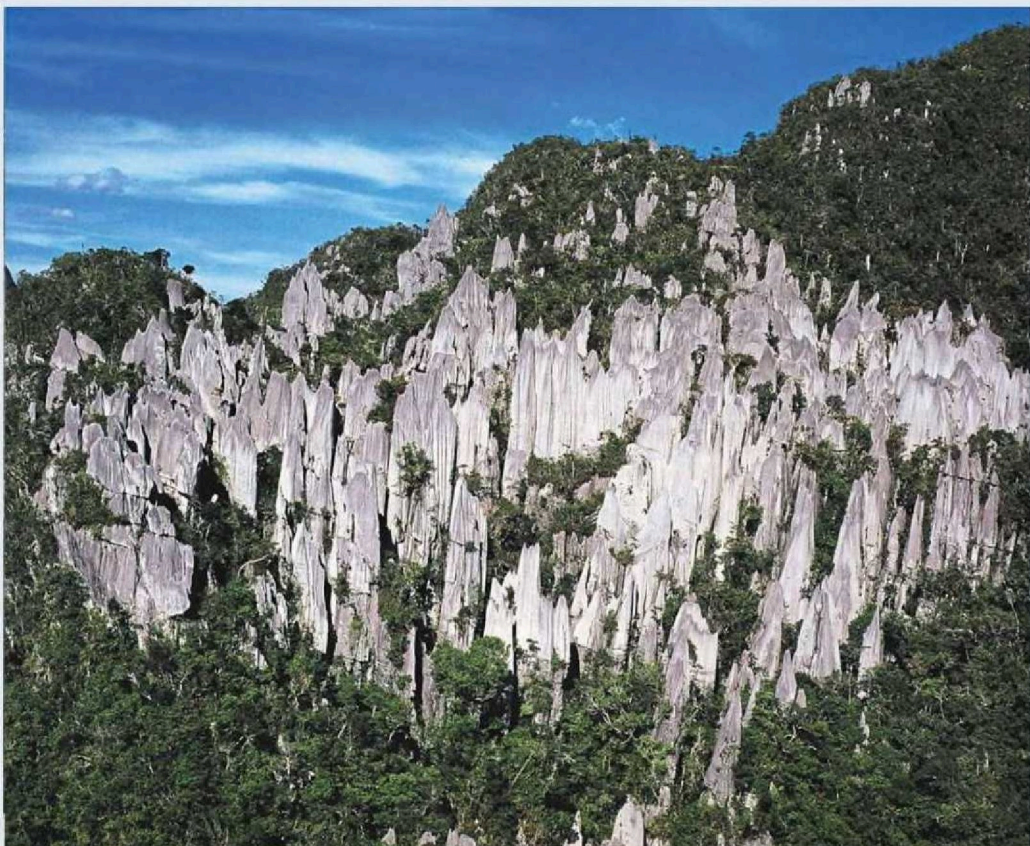
In 2012, at a function in Batu Caves, Selangor, the then prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he would push for Batu Caves to be considered as a Unesco site to safeguard its future.

Recently Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming made a proposal to nominate Chinese New Villages in Selangor as a Unesco World Heritage site.

However, Prof Siti Zuraina was not enthusiastic about the idea, adding that applying for Unesco World Heritage Site designation was a comprehensive process involving several crucial steps, beginning with submitting the site to a country's Tentative List as an expression of intent.

The site must meet at least one of Unesco's 10 selection criteria, and a management plan is essential for ensuring the site's ongoing protection. The nomination undergoes a thorough evaluation by advisory bodies before the World Heritage Committee decides on its inscription.

Successful designation requires long-term commitment to the site's preservation and involves continuous monitoring and reporting to Unesco.



Gunung Mulu National Park is one of four Unesco-designated sites in Malaysia. — Filepic