

'Promote KL history through its stories'

Experts urge broader heritage protection efforts

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PETALING JAYA: An active governing body is needed to oversee effective management, promotion and compliance for physical heritage sites, says Badan Warisan Malaysia (BWM).

Not only should they be maintained sustainably, there should also be more awareness on the importance of preserving heritage buildings, especially in urban and tourist-centric locations, said BWM president Lim Wei-Ling.

This is due to growing recognition of the cultural, historical and economic value of tangible heritage by different segments of the population, she said.

"There should be continuous efforts to educate and engage in linking heritage preservation to broader discussions about identity, sustainability and economic development.

"The government should also emphasise the protection of our built heritage not only in Kuala Lumpur, but nationwide.

"This is to safeguard our heritage buildings from being demolished, preserve them for future generations and enable them to stay as tourist attractions," she said when asked about getting Unesco heritage status for Kuala Lumpur's historic sites.

She added that existing gazetted buildings should be protected and not have their status removed or infringed, while more sites could be recognised and gazetted.

Lim said there are many instances where owners either lack the funds to repair and maintain old heritage buildings, and

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Lim Wei-Ling

find it simpler to sell and divide the proceeds among descendants.

To this tune, she said the government should spearhead initiatives to maintain the structures of pre-independence buildings.

She also said the government should direct and supervise the preparation of a register for all listings at federal and state levels, and mandate guidelines for restoration and heritage preservation.

International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation-International Islamic University Malaysia (Istac-IIUM) Prof Datuk Dr Ahmad Murad Merican called for more consciousness on the conservation of historic buildings, whether private or publicly owned.

"What's important is for the authorities to determine the significance of these buildings and sites to the history of Kuala Lumpur, which is still being contested.

"We have to get our history right. The narrative of Kuala Lumpur's history beginning in 1857 should be contested. It is centuries older. We cannot use

colonial history and institutions to establish our presence in the modern world.

"The fact that there's an earlier name – Pengkalan Lumpur – means that there is a place and sites toward the foothills of the Banjaran Titiwangsa," he noted.

He added that Kuala Lumpur's historic dossier should be well-presented like George Town in Penang and Melaka's applications, which garnered the Unesco World Heritage status since 2008 with their colonial buildings and old shophouses, signifying the hundreds of years of trade and cultural exchange.

Ahmad Murad added that jurisdiction over this can be done with the heritage commissioner for Greater Kuala Lumpur and the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) instead of just depending on civil societies and NGOs.

Malaysian Historical Society honorary secretary-general Prof Dr Zaid Ahmad suggested that comprehensive heritage mapping and authentic historical documentation of Kuala Lumpur be conducted, followed by proper restoration and conservation of historical buildings and architectural heritage.

"We really need to address all aspects including cultural, historical, architectural and environmental. We also need to identify the heritage zones and impose a strict protection policy.

"Community involvement is equally important because Unesco also values not just monuments but also living cultures whereby the locals develop a sense of value and pride in their surrounding heritage," he said.

Asked about his recommendations for Kuala Lumpur historical

Malaysia Nominations for the World Heritage List (*Tentative List*)

National Park (Taman Negara) of Peninsular Malaysia (Pahang)

Taman Negara is the oldest (founded in 1938–39) and the largest national park in Malaysia. It covers diverse ecosystems such as lowland tropical rainforests and mountains, and is rich in flora and fauna.



FRIM Selangor Forest Park, (Selangor)

The park is a man-made tropical rainforest, which was created in an area heavily degraded by tin mining and agriculture. The reforestation initiative commenced in the 1920s, with gradual expansion of the buffer zone since the 1970s.

Gombak Selangor Quartz Ridge (Selangor)

At more than 14km long and 200m wide, it is the longest quartz formation in the world.



Sungai Buloh Leprosarium (Selangor)

Founded in 1930, it was the largest leper colony of the British Empire, with over 2,400 patients at its peak. The settlement was designed as a self-sustained community, with infrastructure allowing the patients to live as close to normal as possible.



Royal Belum State Park (Perak)

Belum-Temenggor is believed to have been in existence for over 130 million years, making it one of the world's oldest rainforests, older than both the Amazon and the Congo.

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sites, he said that aside from Dataran Merdeka and the KTMB Railway Station, the Pudu area, Kampung Baru as well as schools like Victoria Institution and Maxwell can be included.

In April, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim launched Warisan KL (KL Heritage), an initiative aimed at rejuvenating the historic core of Kuala Lumpur, which is spearheaded by Khazanah Nasional through its subsidiary Think City.

It comprises 10 flagship projects within a 20sq km zone ranging from architectural conservation to green corridors.

At least RM600mil is being pumped into this effort which includes the restoration of Carcosa Seri Negara, Sultan Abdul Samad Building, Dataran Merdeka and the Masjid Jamek enclave.

As part of broader efforts to rejuvenate the city's historic core, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has taken steps to secure international recognition as a Unesco Creative City of Design.

In March, DBKL also submitted an application for the Unesco Creative City Network, which prioritises innovation, governance and community engagement through creativity.