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Development should not forsake heritage conservation, says Adi

JASIN, Tues. - The rapid development the country is facing should not be the reason to undermine heritage conservation efforts, Museums and Antiquities Department director-general, Datuk Dr Adi Taha said today.

Expressing regret over the demolition of three old shophouses in Jonker Street on Dec 15, Adi said it would not have happened if people understood the benefits of conservation and were not dictated by benefits.

"Old buildings, artefacts and places of worship represent the characteristics of Malaysian society and remind us of our rich history.

"If we start tearing down or do not appreciate the significance of old structures, ancient objects and old places of worship, Malaysians would certainly lose their identity," Adi said.

Speaking to reporters after handing over the administration of the 85-year-old Ayer Barok mosque which had been restored by the private company Versi Bina Sdn Bhd, to the mosque committee members, Adi said his department was undertaking efforts to conserve several mosques nationwide.

Also present was the department's director for southern region, Ayob Tamrin.

Adi said that while his department did not have provisions to act against the building owners under existing laws as they were not gazetted for conservation, he commended efforts by Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam in seeing justice done.

He also suggested Malacca and Penang, which had been allocated RM20 million each for heritage purposes by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in next year's budget, should use this money wisely.

Asked whether there was a need for professionals in the Malacca Municipal Council or the Jonker Walk Committee to prevent such incidents, Adi said what was needed was a person with a knowledge of heritage.