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Please preserve Acheen Street enclave

AS tourist guides, we are concerned that the proposed re-development of the Acheen Street enclave is going to spoil Penang and Malacca's chances for World Heritage nomination.

The authorities concerned are shortsighted in wanting to demolish houses at the Acheen Street enclave.

A total of 22 houses, including six historic bungalows, will be demolished when a redevelopment project at the Acheen Street Malay Mosque area takes off by year end.

Two blocks of fourstorey flats comprising 58 units will replace them.

This area is right in the middle of the historical enclave, next to the recently restored Khoo Kongsi, the Syed Alatas Mansion (soon to be an Islamic Museum) and the Sun Yet Sen Base.

The Acheen Street area is an integral part of the inner city of George Town.

It is the only Muslim area that is still intact and needs to be preserved.

It is interesting to note that the Acheen Street Malay Mosque was established in 1808.

The Muslim enclave in Acheen Street was once an important place for pilgrims, who gathered there before sailing to Mecca.

Early Arab traders, who came from Aceh, settled here. Tengku Syed Hussain Al-Aidid, an Arab trader, then founded the Acheen Street Malay Mosque in 1808.

It is also commonly known as Masjid Melayu.

The area is replete with history and everything has to be done to save this historical area.

For example, house number 65 on Acheen Street was the home of Syed Agil, a 19th century personality from Palembang.

A Justice of Peace and Mufti of Penang, Sheikh Zakaria Basheer used to stay at house number 67 and a well-known imam, Sheikh Omar Basheer, once stayed at house number 69.

Are we not trying to attract Arab tourists? The Acheen Street Enclave was where the earliest Arab/Acehnese settlers arrived.

This area can serve as a great tourism product.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir is promoting home stay as well as bed and breakfast.

The Acheen Street enclave is ideal for this purpose.

Time and again, we are questioned about our tourism products. We cannot sell Penang as a beach haven alone.

We should also market it as a heritage city with its heritage intact.

All races - Malay, Indian and Chinese - want to preserve their heritage, so the Government should have a strict policy on this.

If we allow our heritage to be destroyed for monetary gains, there will be nothing left for our future generations.

We would like to appeal to Kadir, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to help save the Acheen Street Mosque enclave.

If the area is redeveloped, then the future of our heritage is in grave danger because if one party is allowed to carry out such a development, others would want to do the same.

This site is our tourism product and we appeal to the relevant

authorities to preserve it and develop other areas that are available in