

Bok House lost authenticity for heritage listing

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THE current interest in Bok House has created much public awareness of heritage buildings in Malaysia.

But it has also placed blame on the recently established Department of National Heritage.

While we welcome heritage awareness, we would also like to put the record straight.

Buildings are one of the many types of heritage that we conserve.

Others include artifacts, archaeological sites, underwater cultural material, natural heritage (faunal, flora and geological), and intangible heritage such as music, language and literature.

Our efforts to conserve heritage across a wide spectrum should not and cannot be allowed to be skewed towards one type of heritage.

The ministry carefully studied and concluded that Bok House was not of national importance.

In contrast, two other millionaire's bungalows of the same period — Istana Negara (formerly Chan Wing mansion) and Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman (a few doors from Bok House) — are of heritage value.

These more imposing buildings impacted significantly on our history and had more aesthetic and design value.

The back portion of Bok House was already destroyed.

Much of the internal design and motifs were missing and the building had therefore lost its authenticity and integrity — important criteria for heritage listing anywhere in the world.

So if you take the larger perspective, we have conserved simi-

lar and better buildings.

Among buildings that are regarded of heritage status are the Sultan Abdul Samad building (1894), Stadium Negara (1961), Muzium Negara (1963), Residency (1888), Cheng Hoon Teng Temple Malacca (1894) and Petronas Twin Towers (1998).

Clearly, this shows that age alone is not a factor and neither can it be said that the National Heritage Act does not consider non-government-owned buildings or those owned by individuals.

Among the important criteria stated in the Act are historical importance, scientific or technological innovations, and good design.

Heritage inscription is a long, detailed and legal process involving scholars and experts in the various areas of heritage.

As is the norm elsewhere in the

world, the Act is not meant to be an oppressive instrument and is applied in a humane way, balancing private and collective rights where possible.

When our portal is ready, the public will be able to access information on the different categories of heritage in a multimedia mode.

Anyone can fill in the suggestion form to be posted in the portal on items to be listed in any of the categories of heritage in any part of the country.

On a personal note, having spent almost 40 years helping to build up the nation's heritage, it goes against my grain to do otherwise.

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