

'Clarify Heritage Act'

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PETALING JAYA: The provisions and operation of the National Heritage Act 2005 must be clarified to address misconceptions about it.

Badan Warisan Malaysia executive director Elizabeth Cardoso said this is more important than questioning whether the act is capable of protecting historical buildings.

"Unless there is a clear policy with standards and guidelines for heritage conservation, it is inevitable that Bok House's fate will befall other heritage buildings, and that will be an even greater tragedy," she said in an e-mail interview yesterday.

The 77-year-old Bok House or Le Coq D'Or on Jalan Ampang was the first building nominated under the act as a heritage site to the Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry by Badan Warisan in April this year.

Contractors started tearing the house down last Thursday and by Sunday, the house of Cycle and Carriage empire tycoon Chua Cheng Bok was demolished along with the hopes of conservationists.

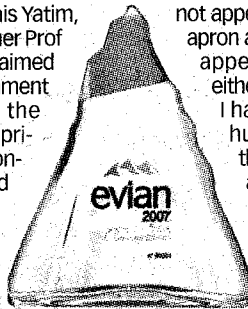
Minister Datuk Seri Rais Yatim, and Heritage Commissioner Prof Datuk Siti Zuraina Majid claimed there was little the government could do to conserve the building because it was private property, and the conservation costs would have been too high.

But others argued that the act does not differentiate between public or privately-owned buildings, and that it was not necessary to tear down the entire building for development.

Architect Lillian Tay said the building or portions of it could have been maintained and development could

have come up around it.

"As we did not have access to Bok House and can only conjecture its state of conservation, we can only guess what it would have cost," Cardoso said. "From the outside, there did not appear to be any cracks. The apron around the house did not appear to have any cracks either and from all the photos I have seen, and there are hundreds taken over the three days, the structure appeared very sound."



Cardosa said there were many shophouses in Penang, Malacca, Taiping, Ipoh and Kuantan, free-standing buildings, mosques, churches and temples, and public buildings such as schools and government offices that were restored and are still being utilised.

"Apart from projects funded and

promoted by the ministry or local or state authorities, there are lots of examples of privately-owned buildings which have been restored, repaired and maintained by their owners."

Among them are:

>> Convent Bukit Nanas' Nazareth Hall in Kuala Lumpur,

>> Methodist Girls' School Malacca which has started restoring one of their buildings,

>> Penang's Convent Light Street which did restoration work with funding from its alumni and others like Friends of Heritage,

>> family homes which have been maintained such as Tun Tan Cheng Lock's house in Malacca

"We need to promote the understanding that heritage has to do with legacies, that built heritage is our physical legacy and that heritage matters because it is what you want to pass on to your heirs," Cardoso said.