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Heritage areas remain protected

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MISCOMMUNICATION:

The root of the problem was narrowed down to poor understanding of English language

THE recent storm which swept Malacca and also the nation concerning the relocation of the second oldest school in the country — the Malacca High School or Sekolah Tinggi Melaka — was all caused by a “miscommunication” at a state executive council meeting.

Investigations into this “miscommunication”, sparked by a letter on the plan by the current state administration to relocate the oldest school in the Unesco World Heritage City which was established in 1826, revealed the root of the problem was the poor understanding of the English language.

However, it was not revealed at what stage this blunder took place but it started when Chief Minister Datuk Seri Idris Haron had in one state executive council meeting sometime this year suggested that an investigation be conducted on the safety of “highland schools” such as the Sekolah Menengah Sains Muzaffar Shah.

The term “highland school” referred to schools located on hilly ground and to check if their slopes were stable or needed some strengthening to ensure the safety of the school’s structures and its students.

However the term “highland schools” was somehow misinterpreted by certain quarters as “land at the high school (Malacca High School)” and the events which happened thereafter led to the issuance of a letter on the relocation of the school by the State Education Department to the Education Ministry’s Planning and Policy Research Division.

In response, the Education Ministry’s Planning and Policy Research Division had asked the state Education Department to seek consent of the school’s management, alumni and PTA on the relocation plan.



The Malacca High School, located in Banda Hilir, won't be sacrificed for any development project. Pic by Khairunisah Lokman

The reason given to relocate the second oldest school in the country was to ease traffic congestion in the heart of the state. A state executive council member even went on to say that the school had been viewed as unsuitable as traffic congestion in the area was getting out of hand.

“The proposal to relocate the school is to provide a better traffic flow. The school area, located in the city centre, is densely packed with people and vehicles, causing major traffic crawl,” he was reported as saying.

This sudden move caused a public outcry as it was the second attempt in 21 years by the state to relocate the school.

The first attempt in 1993 to move the school out of Banda Hilir, together with another two schools, St Francis Institution and the Sacred Heart Convent, failed due to opposition by students and the schools’ alumni.

Idris then responded to this fiasco by stressing that the so-called plan by the state administration to relocate the historical city’s oldest school was never discussed at the weekly state executive council meeting.

“No Exco paper was tabled at any time to discuss any proposal to relocate the school.

“The concerned parties do not have to worry as the state administration has agreed that all schools in the heritage areas in Banda Hilir, including Malacca High School, will not be touched for any development project.”

Idris said he also was not consulted before a letter on the planned

relocation was issued to the school’s management on July 22.

He said with the latest announcement, the matter was no longer an issue.

Besides the Malacca High School other schools that are located in the Unesco world heritage core and buffer zone here include the St Francis Institution and the Sacred Heart Convent.

On July 7, 2008, Malacca along with George Town in Penang were recognised as Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca by Unesco.

In Malacca, the World Heritage Site comprises a 38.62 hectare core zone and a 134.03 hectare buffer zone.

The core zone of the Historic City of Malacca, comprises of two sections divided by Sungai Melaka.

On the east side of the river is the civic zone which includes Porta de Santiago, St Paul’s Hill, Stadthuys, Christ Church and the various colonial buildings that date back to the Dutch and British eras, many of which have been restored and converted into museums.

On the west side of the river is the residential and commercial zone made up of shophouses and houses along Jalan Hang Jebat (Jonker Street), Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock and the various places of worship along Jalan Tokong, Jalan Tukang Emas and Jalan Tukang Besi.

A buffer zone surrounds the core zone and this area is bordered by Jalan Munshi Abdullah, Jalan Ong Kim Wee, Jalan Kota Laksamana, Jalan Merdeka, parts of Jalan Chan Koon Cheng and parts of Kampung Banda Kaba.

And as a precaution against a similar blunder, perhaps command of the English language within the state’s administration, including all departments and agencies, should be made a priority.

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