Asean NGOs meet on conservation
Heritage groups to work towards an Asean body

Seventeen representatives of various heritage organisations in the six Asean countries met in Jakarta between March 13 and 16 this year to learn what was happening in each other's countries and discuss ways to conserve their architectural heritage.

The Indonesian National Heritage Trust organised the dialogue meeting among Non-Governmental Organisations of Asean interested in the conservation of architectural heritage. The Singapore Heritage Society was represented by the President, Mr William Lim and Mr Tan Teck Kiam.

Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand presented reports. The Singapore report was prepared by Tan Teck Kiam in consultation with Singapore Heritage Society members William Lim, Kwa Chong Guan, Lai Choo Malone and Bobby Wong.

At the end of the meeting, representatives jointly issued the Jakarta Declaration expressing deep concern at the fact that in Asean countries, buildings and environments of historic interest and architectural merit are disappearing through indiscriminate urban development, neglect, public ignorance and decay. "The special character of towns and villages is being eroded and unnecessarily destroyed by inappropriate construction and development activities."

It called for the setting up in the near future of an Asean Federation of Architectural Heritage under the auspices of the Asean Organisation to act as a forum of consultation and cooperation. This Federation is to be formed from the National Federations of Architectural Heritage which will be set up to coordinate the NGOs interested in architectural heritage conservation in the respective countries. The express aim of these National Federations will be to work with their respective governments in formulating plans and methods to conserve their national architectural heritage.

"As an integral part of the area's rich cultures, the heritage of Asean countries is recognised as a common invaluable treasure not only of the individual member countries, but also of the whole Asean people. Its presence not only enriches the character of the environment, but also stimulates the consciousness and awareness of the people of the region of their history, values and cultures."

The Dialogue agreed that:
- It is imperative to enhance and conduct common campaigns to arouse appreciation, interest and participation among the Asean communities of their architectural heritage through various ways;
- Through the spirit of ASEA solidarity, a joint effort is deemed necessary to safeguard our architectural heritage as a shared treasure of the communities in the region.

Indonesia was appointed to submit and inform the Asean Secretariat of the intention to establish the Asean Federation on Architectural Heritage and prior to the establishment of the Federation, to coordinate, collect and disseminate information on the legal, organisation and other related aspects pertaining to architectural heritage in all member-countries.

The Declaration also agreed that each participant of the Dialogue was to bring this Jakarta Declaration to the attention of their respective authorities for endorsement by the end of 1991.

Society AGM to be at National Museum

The AGM this year will be held in the National Museum Theatre on May 14 at 5.30 pm. And for the first time, the annual dinner will be a separate function from the AGM.

On the agenda for the AGM will be the proposal to create sub-groups within the Society to give its activities more definition and in recognition of the wide range covered by the word "heritage". The tentative groupings are for:
- Heritage of the physical environment;
- Written heritage inclusive of all textual matter;
- Heritage of performing arts (dance, music, puppetry etc)
- Heritage of culture and lifestyles (handicrafts, art, food etc).

Essentially the different groups will take on activities which are already being covered by the Society as a whole. As a smaller special interest group, however, members can hopefully pursue this special interest more intensively and more fruitfully.

President William Lim said that he expected things to happen with the creation of these groups. Things are also looking up on the heritage scene with more awareness of heritage issues among the public and private sectors.

He was optimistic about the outcome of the Asean NGO dialogue meeting held in Jakarta recently. A meeting was arranged with Acting Minister of Information and Arts BG George Yeo to brief him on the Jakarta Declaration among other matters.

Also up for discussion at the AGM will be the offer from the Ministry of Information and Arts of accommodation for the Society. An idea tossed up for discussion at a committee meeting was whether the Society should ask for an old building which could be restored as a showcase.
**Heritage Watch**

**News and views on heritage issues in the press**

**What's in a name?**

The issue of names, heritage and the Singaporean identity surfaced early this year with the White Paper on Shared Values and developing a Singaporean identity.

Reader Lee Kip Lee opened the debate in a letter to The Straits Times: "Can we ever capture the essence of being a Singaporean and will the next generation grow up in our image when our heritage and our history (our names) are being tampered with whilst we live in places with such outlandish names as Defu (Tampines), Bishan (Peck San), Simei and Xilin (Ulu Bedok), and whilst SBC gives its Chinese actors such stage names as Zhong Liqing, He Xuqiu and Wang Yuxiang instead of emulating our leaders who are instantly and proudly identifiable by their Singaporean names."

Mr Lee quoted Acting Minister for Information and Arts BG George Yeo: "Shared values should draw upon Singapore's own history rather than a wholesale transplantation of foreign ideas."

Another ST reader, Mrs Hedwig Anuar, pointed out that old names would "help give our younger generation a sense of continuity which can only strengthen its growing Singaporean identity while minimising the sense of dislocation and loss felt by the older generation with each change of name."

Reader Teo Han Wue protested that there was nothing "unSingaporean" about pinyin names. After all, these were nothing more than romanisations of the original Chinese characters. "It also serves as a convenient pronunciation guide for those who cannot read Chinese."

In a letter Mr Tay Kheng Soon pointed out that Mr Teo could not claim that Hanju Pinyin was nationally accepted, least of all when applied to place and personal names. He thought it unlikely that Mr Teo would advocate changes to the names of historical personages, otherwise "how would a non-Chinese and a non-Chinese speaker recognise a national figure...."

Mr Teo: "Why change people and place names so that they are indistinguishable from names in China? Is it wise to abandon a tradition of place and people names shared by the whole community merely because of "recent language developments in one community...? Place names must not be confused with language developments within a community. This is because place names are shared."

"Indeed, in a multi-cultural community, every community has a duty to the other communities to maintain the consistency of the common heritage. Place names are part of the common heritage."

"I like the emblem of the Singapore Heritage Society, which is a big bushy tree but with equally big and deeply penetrating roots. The metaphor being that the more you want the tree to flourish and grow, the deeper the roots must be."

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**Eu Court to go**

Eu Court at the junction of Hill Street and Stamford Road, which stands in the heart of an important preservation area, is to make way for an eight-lane highway in Hill Street. Built in the late 1920s by prominent businessman Eu Tong Sen, it was one of the first residential apartment buildings in Singapore. Where is the traffic congestion in Hill Street to justify sacrificing Eu court, protested ST reader Joyce Ho Boon Eng and others. Besides, given the policy of restricting the number of cars, why were the authorities making life easier for motorists at the expense of beautiful old buildings?

The Heritage Society also wrote a detailed letter requesting the authorities to rethink the destructive highway plan. The letter expressed the Society's concern that knocking down Eu Court might be the thin end of the wedge and that other buildings in that area may eventually disappear in the same manner.

**Sam Mui Kuang dragon kiln**

"Keep the kiln, the business can be closed" goes one school of thought. "What is the use of a cultural relic?" Keep it as an ongoing business?" is the other school of thought.

This 47-year-old dragon kiln in Ang Mo Kio was in the news with reports that it was likely to make way for development along with the vanishing trade of pottery.

It is one of three kilns left out of about 10 before the war.

A satisfactory solution to the $12,000 market rate rental demand by the Jurong Town Corporation for the space looks unlikely. The Chua family which is running the family business has already made plans to relocate to cheaper land in Bintan. A book on the kiln, pottery works both here and in China and the story of an immigrant businessman is being planned. It is based on oral history interviews with the founder-owner of the kiln, Chua Eng Cheow.

**ACS forever**

Which is the oldest Anglo-Chinese School building? A Straits Times reader wrote pleading that the building in Cairnhill Road be preserved. Rev T R Doraisamy of the Methodist Church says in response: Although built in 1928, this is not the oldest ACS building. That honour goes to a small building in Coleman Street now partly used by the Methodist Book Room. This was built in 1885.

**New historic Masjid Jamek**

The 130-year-old Masjid Jamek in Telok Blangah is to make way for a new copy, it was reported in The Straits Times in April. Owned by the Johor Sultanate, the mosque goes back to the origins of Singapore. According to the report, the Sultan felt that the mosque was too old to be renovated successfully. A decision was made to build it anew but to the old design and architecture to preserve its historic links.

The mosque was originally a balairong or courthouse where subjects could bring their problems to Temenggong Daeng (1825-1862), son of Temenggong Abdul Rahman who signed the treaty which allowed Raffles to set up a British trading post in Singapore.

**Sterile Tanjong Pagar**

Reader Glenn Tan Kim Jin wrote to say that while the Tanjong Pagar restoration looked elegant, it was "disappointingly boring and sterile". While the URA had done a good job of attracting the highest bidders to move into the area, Mr Tan wondered if the success of restoration should be based on commercial gains and a postcard-perfect facade. He suggested that the businesses picked should also contribute to the cultural landscape of the area.

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Feedback on Kg Bugis Development

THE TWO VISIONS

Kampong Bugis Area: Bounded by Nicoll Highway, Crawford Street, Kallang Road, Sims Avenue and the proposed Kallang Expressway; on the fringe of the Central Business District (CBD). To the north are the Lavender and Kallang MRT stations; to the south the National Stadium and the Kallang sports and recreational areas.

URA vision:
- Residential development on both sides of the Kallang River largely maximising the potential of the waterfront sites; and two commercial areas centring on the Lavender MRT Station, and the other at Kallang MRT Station.
- To upgrade the river as a major open space and recreational focus: water sports facilities, jogging paths, picnic spots, parks. The Kallang Waterfront Park will continue northwards along the banks of the Kallang and Rochor Rivers as part of the green park network and southwards to the Kallang Sports Complexes and Tanjong Rhu.
- In terms of land use, Kampong Bugis acts as an area of transition between the Central Area activities, the industrial and commercial employment areas and the high-intensity housing areas, and the sports and recreational areas at Kallang Basin.

The strategy is to develop a quality waterfront residential environment which is well-integrated with the commercial centres as well as the institutional and recreational facilities within the waterfront park; retain buildings of historical, cultural and architectural interest; and phase out incompatible or hazardous industries existing in the area.

Singapore Institute of Architects’ vision:
If opportunities for high-density developments in appropriate areas are not realised, then other areas on the island will have to take the density load, thus eroding precious natural and heritage sites and reducing lifestyle options. Kampong Bugis development offers one such option: a vibrant high-density urban lifestyle with a residential-commercial mix.

Kampong Bugis can provide the vital overspill space and support facilities needed by the Central Area, a clustering of residential accommodation and new economic activities including financial services, corporate HQs, and multimedia telematic businesses. At present it is seen as a transitional zone between the City and the traditional area of Geylang. It can be more than that.

Among the urban design guidelines: climatic responsiveness including orientation of buildings away from the sun and into the wind; screening of traffic noise generated by major highways; mixed-use developments combining commercial and residential spaces; shaded and linked pedestrian walkways with separation of carparking facilities at sub-basement level; maximum use of the water edges; 100 per cent horizontal and 60 per cent of vertical surfaces should be replanted; incorporating measures to collect, filter and use rainwater for plants, cooling of buildings and cleaning purposes; use of solar energy with tax incentives given for capital cost; environmental richness and variety; incrementality in development; preserving future options and allowing growth and change over time.

On this basis, it has recommended very high intensive development for parcels of land presently available within the central area. As these assumptions have far-reaching implications, it is important to explore all other alternatives. Many questions will need to be debated and answered before this major change of planning policy direction should take place. They include:

- Population growth

The present suggestion of population growth may be incorrect. What if our population does not reach four million and stabilises at 3.5 million? In which instance, the new towns will not need to be built. This is a possible scenario.

- Private Sector Land

There should be considerable scope for increasing the development intensity to land presently allocated to the private sector. Both teams have ignored this. Presently only 100,000 is projected. A more in-depth study is necessary on this issue.

- Growth Triangle

It is conceivable that the land use requirement of Singapore should be reassessed within the context of the “growth triangle”, whereby many of our leisure facilities, such as large nature reserves, golf courses etc can

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ASEAN country reports

SINGAPORE

The need to preserve part of the Singapore heritage was mentioned as early as 1963 in an unpublished United Nations report on “Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore”. However, the physical task of nation-building in the early years placed other tasks before the need to preserve our physical heritage. By the 70s, with the development of the economy in place and the demand for public housing met, the time was ripe for the issue of conservation to be publicly debated.

Early attempts

The government planning agency took a few isolated shots at conservation; Murray Street (1977), Cuppage Terrace (1977) and Emerald Hill (1981). Professional and academic discussion was intense. Renewed impetus in the private sector culminated in two important events.

The first, in 1982, was a private sector scheme to show the desirability and viability of urban conservation. It involved the conservation development of some shophouses in the prime commercial district of Boat Quay along the Singapore River. The other was a seminar on adaptive reuse in 1984 conducted jointly by Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology and in conjunction the publication of a book titled Pastel Portraits detailing charming old buildings and streetscapes in various parts of Singapore.

By the mid-80s, the mood in the government began to move towards accepting the principle of conservation, in part because of the realisation that it could form a major component of tourist facilities. Another factor was the growing desire for the people to identify with the history of our city.

Legislation

In 1970, the Preservation of Monuments Act came into being. To date, 23 buildings have been gazetted as monuments. Most of these are government institutions and religious buildings in the Central Area.

In 1989, the Planning Act and the Urban Redevelopment Authority Act were amended concurrently. The Acts provide for the designation of Conservation Areas and appointment of a Conservation Authority. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) was designated the Conservation Authority with the task of formulating and enforcing conservation requirements and guidelines.

Since then, the URA has developed a comprehensive programme that included geographical coverage, type of buildings and implementation strategy. At present, the gazetted Conservation Areas cover about 100 hectares spread over 10 sites within the Central Area. Most of the sites are within the four historic areas of Boat Quay, Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India. Others are Cairnhill, Clarke Quay and Emerald Hill. The architectural styles and characteristics of the buildings have also been documented. Standards of restoration including dimensions, materials and colours have also been worked out.

To enlarge the building stock under conservation, several individual detached houses built in the 20s and 30s (affectionately called the black and white bungalows) have also been preserved.

Rent Control restrictions

The 1947 Rent Control Ordinance was designed to protect tenants at a time of great housing shortage after the war. It prevented landlords from evicting tenants without their consent. Many of these “Rent Control” buildings are in the Conservation Areas, neglected by owners who have no incentive to upkeep them. On the positive side, the Act has prevented landlords from indiscriminate demolition and hence indirectly preserving a stock of old buildings.

To encourage private participation in conservation, the government has recently lifted rent control restrictions. This allows landlords to recover buildings from their tenants for conservation development.

Two incentive schemes were also introduced. The first is the waiver of development tax which is normally imposed on all developments involving a change of use. The second is the waiver of car parking charges which are levied on developments which do not provide adequate car parking facilities.

Conservation projects

Emerald Hill, consisting of two and three-storey townhouses, was the first residential area in the city to be restored by private sector initiative in 1981. The first major conservation project carried out by the URA was in Tanjong Pagar in 1987. The entire stock of shophouses had been acquired earlier and the tenants resettled. In the first demonstrative phase of the development, 32 units were restored and then leased out through tenders.

The URA envisaged Tanjong Pagar as a mixed-use area with shops, restaurants and offices on the ground level with residences and other trades on the upper levels. At present, half of the buildings are restored whilst under renovation.

The Boat Quay conservation development does not involve the URA directly as most of the shophouses are privately owned. The local community is keen to see conservation development. It has announced its intention to acquire the picturesque buildings from the landlords if they wish to drag their feet.

Through public tenders the URA has let out a few monuments and buildings of architectural interest for adaptive reuse, with stated conditions that original architectural features and character are to be kept. Proposals go through an architectural design review panel consisting of representatives from relevant government agencies.

Appraisal of efforts

Conservation is about the adaptation and rehabilitation of national heritage. Yet current conservation policy through privatisation so as to emphasise preservation of only the platonic fabric with less emphasis on its usage.

What's in the Singapore

- URA-restored shophouses in Little India
- Kampong Glam, the original Malay settlement at the end of the year;
- Raffles Hotel with its French renaissance expansion;
- Telok Ayer Market, a 19th century Victoria Market converted into a festival market;
- Tender for the restoration of the Convent of the Charity to a public company which proposes to:
  - Clarke Quay warehouses being converted to offices;
  - There are also plans to restore several other buildings and convert them into museums. The first is the Empress Place Museum which will house the Joseph’s Institution will be similarly

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the intangible interest of preserving cultural heritage and history for the people as priority. This means that the government must be prepared to forego high biddings in selected projects.

In fact, the argument that the government should not pay for the restoration of a monument which is to be privatised is not always correct. The government could allow NGOs to restore and maintain these monuments with public assistance. These monuments can be designated for the sole enjoyment of the people. The issue of profit is not relevant. This could be classified as another category of adaptive reuse.

Conclusion

Conservation is a relatively new planning issue in Singapore. For the last 10 years, quite a lot of academic and professional efforts have been put into it. The government has also through the URA drawn comprehensive technical guidelines, conducted extensive research and produced substantial documents on conservation. Most important of all, it has initiated effective and well-intended legislation. This is ultimately the litmus test of the commitment to urban conservation.

Though there are still many shortcomings in the Singapore experience, it is nevertheless a decisive step in the direction that will ensure a reasonable quantum of our heritage is preserved. The Heritage Society believes that conservation is a continuous process. Having taken the major step, the government now needs to fine-tune the legislation and their implementation strategies. In the final analysis, this task falls on a committed partnership among all sectors of the nation.

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HAILAND

About 1,400 buildings have been listed as ancient monuments. Most are places of worship and some are in active use. In the past, conservation has generally meant the reconstruction of old religious buildings back to its proper status as temples as a mark of respect for the religion. Other cultural values such as history or archaeology were not considered.

King Rama IV also known as King Mongkut (1851-1868) pioneered the modern approach to old buildings as possessing cultural and historical value. King Rama VI (1910-1926) issued the first conservation legislation in 1923. This covered conservation of cultural properties and the architectural heritage. Officials were empowered to select what would be preserved and also to find means of preserving them. In 1926 King Rama VII founded the Royal Council charged with responsibilities for the conservation of cultural heritage.

It has taken Thailand about 100 years to develop her concept of architectural heritage conservation from the traditional one of mere rebuilding to the more modern and international approach of conservation with regard for cultural values.

The Fine Arts Department under the Ministry of Education is the government body responsible for conservation of cultural properties. Conservation works can only be carried out with the consent of the director-general. Of the 10 divisions in this department, two - Divisions of Archaeology and Architecture - are responsible for architectural heritage conservation. Funds come from income generated by the old monuments and from donations.

The private body with interest in conservation is the Association of Siamese Architects whose main objective is to encourage interests in architecture and related arts and to look after the quality of architectural design. The Society was behind the successful restoration of a 200-year-old timber library with mural paintings at Wat Rakang, Bangkok, between 1968 and 1982.

Public focus on the issue of care of historic buildings and the value of cultural property came to bear in the case of the Vishnul Temple. This ancient temple was restored from the 10-13th century Phnom Rung Temple and discovered at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1973. After much strenuous campaigning and diplomatic effort, it was returned in 1988 and now takes pride of place at the restored temple.

Sukhothai Park

The concept of urban conservation was introduced in 1977, with the Sukhothai Historical Park Development Project. This project illustrated conservation as an interdisciplinary subject and was carried out using a well-planned methodology.

The aim was to revive the historical atmosphere of the ancient city by preserving and restoring ancient edifices, reviving the landscape, improving communication systems and developing the community.

Various approaches comprising preservation, consolidation, reconstruction, restoration etc were used. However, a 1981 technical report by the Fine Arts Department revealed the lack of knowledge about the traditional building materials.

* See page 6
Asean NGO dialogue on architectural conservation

Continued from page 5

Asean country reports

Early restoration works were influenced by the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient’s techniques of preservation and consolidation.

Restoration work at Sukhothai during 1953-1955 was mainly reconstruction with less regard to the archaeological evidence. The second restoration between 1965 and 1969 was undertaken with better techniques.

Conservation law

Thailand’s Charter of Architectural Conservation, issued in 1985, reveals an attempt to combine the traditional practice of restoration as rebuilding, with the international technique as proposed by the Venice Charter.

The proper approach to architectural heritage conservation was evident around 1930 and legislation and an administration body originated around 1934. Practical aspects of conservation have been developed since then.

However, the 1961 Conservation Act is in need of some modifications. For instance, the term “ancient monument” should encompass the built environment ranging from historic areas to historic buildings and certain structures of some technological value.

The conservation of areas should be separated from the present Conservation Act by a more effective system. Key terms should also be more clearly defined and punitive measures for non-compliance increased.

The re-organisation of the administrative structure may be necessary to encourage more dynamic performance, get more administrative power, an improved budget and greater manpower. Better understanding of conservation as an interdisciplinary work is necessary.

More studies on traditional structures, building materials and craftsmanship should be encouraged. The establishment of the main body of knowledge on conservation is necessary to organise a systematic education on conservation.

MALAYSIA

The concept of conservation of architectural heritage is comparatively new and unfamiliar to the majority of Malaysians. The problems of architectural conservation were found in general to fall under four main headings:

- Public education;
- Need to expand expertise in the country at both professional and technical levels;
- Financial incentives to private owners of heritage buildings/heritage areas;
- Establishment of a countrywide register of such buildings/areas;

- Legal framework required.

Melaka Conservation

There are valuable lessons from the experience of attempting to conserve old Melaka. The legal framework for conservation work is the Malacca Enactment on Conservation, which was the result of state government and private sector dialogue in 1985.

Following the Enactment, these were some of the problems which surfaced:

- Without adequate staffing, implementation was patchy at best; officers confessed to lack of knowledge in implementing the Enactment;
- The committees set up under the Enactment met only sporadically and was heavily represented by the public sector;
- No clear guidelines and procedures have been issued to the general public on the practical aspects of the Enactment. An inventory so necessary to the implementation of any conservation effort is still outstanding.

The Badan Warisan (Heritage of Malaysia Trust) despite the lack of official status continues to work at personal levels to ensure that the good intentions of the Enactment are fulfilled.

Badan Warisan

Acknowledged as the foremost NGO on architectural conservation in the country, the Badan Warisan was set up in 1983 as a limited company and tax-exempt charity. Its members include architects and historians who are able to provide advice and information on buildings of interest. A Chapter has been started in Perak, and Badan Warisan hopes to have one in all the states in the country.

Being a charity with no fixed income, the Badan Warisan relies on membership subscriptions and donations from individuals and private organisations to finance its projects. Since its inception, the Badan Warisan has involved itself in some 16 architectural conservation projects, many still ongoing. Among its successes was the saving of Central Market, now a lively cultural market to rival Convent Garden in London and a must-visit tourist attraction.

In 1986 and 1990, it held two conferences on architectural heritage conservation. It has also published several books, started a library of reference books which will be expanded to include slides and photographs and lists of artisans, architects and suppliers with skill in conservation work.

It has also helped to amend current legislation to make it more favourable to conservation of historic buildings. With the proposed repeal of the pre-war Rent Control Act which has kept intact many pre-war buildings, the Badan Warisan is also looking into ways to prevent the demolition of these old buildings.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Awareness of conservation is relatively minimal compared with neighbouring countries and is a concern voiced by a very small group of people. Therefore it does not get much attention from either the government or the public.

Being small in population and size, Brunei is particularly susceptible to outside influence. It is especially important for Brunei to start looking at conservation in the hope that through conservation of important or significant buildings, landmarks etc. it could contribute to the preservation of culture and traditions. For the young such places could be a permanent repository of knowledge, a place to learn about their own culture and values.

Even the conservation of more mundane buildings are worthwhile. For example, certain sections of Kampung Ayer (Water Village) should be preserved as uniquely Bruneian. Historically, the palaces of the earlier sultanes were built on stilts in Kampung Ayer. Its population of over 30,000 people who live over water and communicate via boats and bridges comprise the bulk of the population of Bandar Seri Begawan.

As the society becomes more urbanised and moves inland, it may not be long before Kampung Ayer becomes history. The cultural benefits are obvious but we can also benefit from tourism through conservation of such places.

PHILIPPINES

Architectural heritage conservation was formally started in the Philippines at the turn of the 19th century during the American period. However, as early as during the Spanish colonial period, repair, replacement and reconstruction of damaged structures due to fires, earthquakes and wars had already been undertaken following certain guidelines imposed by the central Spanish government.

The idea of preserving monuments to the country’s past was through piecemeal legislation in 1918. In 1972, the National Historical Institute was created. In late 1970s, the Institute supervised the restoration of the walls of the Intramuros, the old walled city built by the Spanish. Today the Intramuros Administration is under the Department of Tourism. There are plans to turn this walled city into a revitalised cultural zone as a showcase of Philippine history and culture and as a living city.

* See page 7
Raffles Hotel hunts for mementoes

By the time Raffles Hotel Museum Curator Gretchen Liu is through, the legendary hotel will "offer a montage of more than a hundred years of history - the history of Singapore, of Raffles Hotel, and of what was very much a "grand era of travel"."

To that end, Mrs Liu embarked on a worldwide search for memorabilia, stationery, photographs, and anything and everything that would tell the story of one of the most myth-enraptured hosteries in the world.

"We are in need of materials from all periods: late 19th century up to the 1970s, said Mrs Liu. "In that sense, we are also searching for mementoes of travel to the Far East when Raffles was in its heyday, 1900 to the 1930s, and other old Singapore hotels that no longer exist such as the Adelphi, Europe and Seaview."

Newly recovered treasures

The cherished but half-forgotten things that bring back old family memories are exactly what Mrs Liu is looking for to help assure a historically accurate restoration of the Raffles which was first opened in 1887.

The search which started as soon as the hotel was closed in 1989 for restoration uncovered treasures. Last year, these were exhibited together with rare period paintings and prints acquired for the hotel rooms and public areas. They will form part of the collection of the hotel's museum. The hotel is to re-open in September.

The search is still on and among Mrs Liu's wish list are photographs of social events at the hotel especially pre-1960s. "Surprisingly, these are very rare," she said. Anyone with anything of interest can call Mrs Liu at tel. 339-8377.

Asean NGO dialogue

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Asean country reports

Although there is sufficient legislation governing the preservation of historic sites and structures in the country, there is need for a collective and general historic preservation code. The Presidential Commission on Culture and Arts whose sole responsibility is to provide direction for the country's historic-cultural preservation and propagation, was created in 1987.

Several bills are in process but await enactment into law. One is the proposed National Historic Preservation Act; another bill would give tax incentives to individuals or corporations which undertake architectural conservation.

The Philippines does not have any professional architectural conservators. Many have had training in specialised fields in conservation locally and abroad. There are some special problems. One involves the vintage mission churches which are still in use as houses of worship. The government sometimes finds it a problem to implement the national historic act because of the existing separation of church and state. A major problem is the lack of funds for conservation. National economic recovery is a more urgent priority.

INDONESIA

Interpreting the remains of the past is one of the issues of conservation. For instance, many think that to preserve the historic Taman Fatahillah - the heart of the Dutch administration in old Batavia - is to maintain the memory of 350 years of colonial life. However, a closer look shows that Jakarta was not just a colonial city but a lively international port that won it the name "Queen of the East". Its coastal culture was enriched by the contributions of many people from all over the world including the great empires of China and India.

Conservation aim and law

The aim is to create living environments to support historic sites rather than to clear an area of its social fabric and turn it into a sterile museum environment. This raises practical challenges to many a developer who finds a levelling process an easier and often financially cheaper way to revitalise an area.

The principal guidelines on preservation of architectural heritage are defined in Ordinance on Monuments No. 238 established in 1930. This restricts and prescribes the containment of historic sites but sorely needs changes today to be more responsive to the dynamics of the city's conditions and needs.

Private sector participation in preservation activities is essential given that most historic sites in Jakarta are in intensely populated and commercially active areas. Favorable loans and tax incentives for revitalisation programmes are ways to get private sector participation.

Social education needs to be an integral part of the planning, as important as physical restructuring of the buildings themselves. Yayasan Pelestari Budaya Bangsa

The Yayasun Pelestari Budaya Bangsa (Indonesian National Heritage Trust) was established in 1989 with the principal aim of increasing public awareness of historic sites as national assets along with recognising their role in preserving our historical and cultural heritage.

Its activities include various research programmes enhanced by seminars, training programmes and publications. Inventory work and documentation centres are also necessary elements. The Trust also seeks to cooperate with other organisations and agencies to advance mutual goals.

Books, books, books


Singapore's Dunrkirk by Geoffrey Brooke. UK; Leo Cooper, 1989. 256 pages. Hardcover $67.75. About the fall of Singapore to the Japanese.


Copies are available from Select Books at Tanglin Shopping Centre tel. 732-1515.)
Malayan Nature Society's conservation plan

THE Malayan Nature Society has earmarked 11 "high-priority" areas in its recently released conservation master plan. The plan to conserve what is left of Singapore's natural heritage was based on studies of sites of important ecological value for the past 15 years. The 11 areas are: Sungei Buloh, Kranji marshes, Senoko, Pulau Ubin, Mandai mangroves, Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, Freshwater swamp forest in Nee Soon, Central Water Catchment Area, Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong. Apart from these 11 sites, the plan also covers 16 less crucial areas including the Botanic Gardens and Kent Ridge.

The MNS plan recommends that parts of the 11 areas be left untouched by future development as they are the last remaining spots in Singapore with sufficient natural vegetation to support wildlife. This wildlife now consists mostly of birds. The plan also identifies the distribution, scarcity and numbers of the existing wildlife species.

It calls for major development plans to be accompanied by assessments of environmental impact, and for all site works in these earmarked areas to be carefully supervised by environmental inspectors. Copies of the plan have been sent to Ministry of National Development, Environment Min-

istry, Urban Redevelopment Authority, Housing Board, Jurong Town Corporation and other government departments.

Copies of the plan are on sale at $5 for members and $8 for non-members plus $1.50 extra for postage. Write to: MNS c/o Hon Secretary, Botany Dept., NUS, Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 0511.

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Kampung Bugis

be substantially allocated outside Singapore. We may wish to consider our land allocation in this new perspective. In this context, the construction of new towns can certainly be considered as a viable option.

High Density Living

While it is desirable to preserve plenty of greenery and nature reserves in Singapore for leisure and recreation, the question is whether a substantial number of our population is prepared to live in a very high-density environment within the central area.

The Heritage Society is delighted to note that both schemes have identified a number of buildings and structures for conservation. However, the effectiveness of maximising these heritage landmarks will substantially depend on the contextual treatment of their immediate environment.

The SIA proposal has recommended many useful urban design guidelines. Some of these can be further investigated for adoption. Like many professionals, the SIA team must have attached negatively with the "more of the same" visual images of the the HDB new towns. These are dull, boring and lacking identity. However, it is important also to recognise the general correctness of certain basic planning premises of these new towns. They include the plot ratio of 2 to 2.5, the reasonable space standards of the units, the adequate supporting facilities and the good maintenance and management etc. These are the underlying reasons for their success. With a more enlightened and innovative approach, it is conceivable that even the present estates can be upgraded and most of the deficiencies overcome. This is certainly possible in the future new towns.

In conclusion, the Heritage Society wishes to congratulate the Ministry for commissioning planning studies by the private sector. The SIA scheme for Kampung Bugis has certainly generated much controversy and has focused on several major planning issues which will need to be further discussed, before a comprehensive national land use policy can be established to meet the changing demands and expectations of the new generation.