



DECIDING THE FATE OF “OLD” BUILDINGS

Heritage Impact Assessment



SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

WORLD FOCUS



Above: The former Federated Malay States survey department office when it was completed in 1903. Right: The building, which is part of a stretch of buildings that flank the historic Merdeka Square, is now vacant and in disrepair. A sign for the dome is broken. PHOTO: ARCHITECTURE/HERALD, TRAVEL, LEONG



The famed 12m-long arcade of the former survey office building is shown with rubbish left behind by the business people who have taken five vacant 107-year-old building, their temporary lodgings. ST PHOTO: FRANK, LEONG



The inside of the dome with a tiled floor. The damaged dome has been covered but not fixed. ST PHOTO: FRANK, LEONG



An undated photo of Masjid Jamek, Kuala Lumpur's oldest mosque. The mosque was known for its Indian Muslim Mughal architectural style, with intricate tiles in front of it and steps leading to the confluence of the Klang and Senongga rivers. PHOTO: ARJUN BAKSH/AP/REUTERS



Heritage buildings near KL's Merdeka Square



FACTS AND FIGURES
• Kuala Lumpur has 77 gazetted buildings according to national heritage NGO Asian Heritage Foundation.
• Of these, 78 are buildings located within the compound of Malaysia's public service headquarters in Putrajaya in addition to the buildings in Merdeka Square, other gazetted sites include the central railway station in 2017's declaration and Merdeka Square.
• Under the new guidelines, Merdeka Square buildings are gazetted as an privately owned "heritage site" under the Act as well protected from demolition and redevelopment.

Heritage under siege

More stories at straitstimes.com
VIDEO Take a stroll along historical landmarks near Merdeka Square. str.sg/klnews

Kuala Lumpur's heritage buildings under threat

Misguided spending, poor maintenance and bad planning have left these icons in disrepair

Prima Leong
Malaysia Correspondent
in Kuala Lumpur

While strolling around Kuala Lumpur's historic Merdeka Square, observers like copper-domed red bricks of the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, and its famous clock tower, conservationists Marisa has cautioned the small group of architects and planners.

"What we see next will pain us," she says.

Their step-by-step plan and cover for the variables that could affect the city's architectural heritage. It is a plan that will be more of a stopgap measure to preserve the city's architectural heritage, rather than a long-term plan to preserve the city's architectural heritage.

Adding insult to injury, the



works are destroying the historical value and spirit of the Sultan Abdul Samad Building and conservationists near Merdeka Square in Kuala Lumpur are opposing construction work on the river. They were also concerned that the buildings' structural integrity was being compromised.

The biggest problem is where you start zoning plans growing on the river. The buildings will soon fall apart when there's no maintenance," said Muziman, a former member of Malaysia's Institute of Architects (IOA).

Prima Leong, Nara Ayo has said the buildings fell into neglect since the late 1980s. "We have spent for RM10 million, but have not seen anything from the treasury," she said. "We need to see how we can get the buildings back to their original glory."

Conservationists are worried that new land use plans will be approved for the river project, but not to preserve these iconic old buildings.

There's a long-term plan when there was a new government building, they moved to Kuala Lumpur," she said. "We have a lot of buildings that are in a state of disrepair, but we have not seen anything from the treasury."

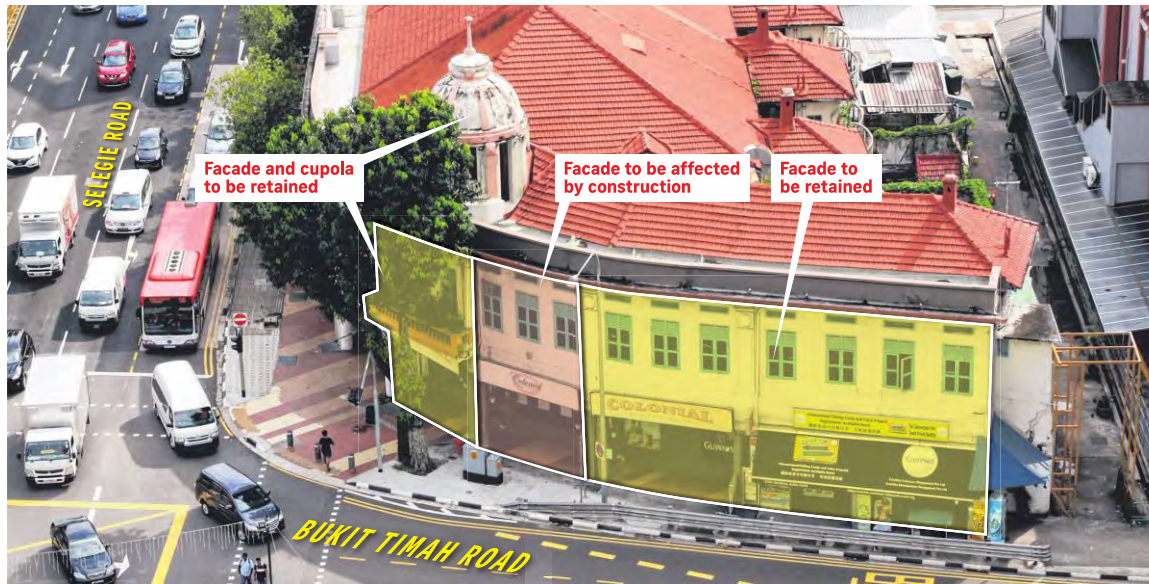
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Construction is ongoing for the River of Life project, which aims to rejuvenate the city's river. In the background is Masjid Jamek, which is being restored with its original tiles. PHOTO: ARCHITECTURE/HERALD, TRAVEL, LEONG



STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Just one section of the curved corner fronting Bukit Timah Road will be affected by the construction of the upcoming North-South Corridor. The authorities said the affected section intersects the expressway's tunnelling works.

SOURCE: URA, ST FILE PHOTO

Bigger portion of conserved Ellison Building to be kept

Plan revised after public outcry and over a year of deliberation; only a corner section affected

Melody Zaccheus
Heritage and Community Correspondent

A larger portion of the conserved Ellison Building in Selegie, which was slated to be partially demolished to make way for an express-

way, will be kept than was previously planned.

Following a public outcry and more than a year of deliberation, just one section of the curved corner fronting Bukit Timah Road will be affected by the construction of the upcoming North-South Corridor. The original plan

involved three sections.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) said in a joint release with the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) yesterday that the revised plan seeks "to maximise the retention" of the structure with the construction of the 21.5km expressway, estimated to be completed around 2026.

The authorities said the affected section intersects the expressway's tunnelling works. It will be demolished and reconstructed to facili-

tate the safe access of machinery.

The interior and back of the building's corner unit, which comprises the three sections, will still have to make way for construction work on the expressway. A portion of the expressway will run under the building's corner unit.

The authorities added that the section bearing the cupola will be retained. Other historic elements, such as the structure's original timber window frames and the metal building name plate, will be tempo-

rarily removed and stored carefully for future reinstatement.

The authorities met heritage groups on Monday to share with them the results of its "extensive technical discussions and studies" and consultations with conservation and engineering specialists.

The heritage community termed the outcome as positive, noting that pains were taken to reduce damage to the property and to retain its integrity.

International Council on Monuments and Sites (Singapore) president Kevin Tan said: "By and large, everybody was happy that the authorities took real trouble to find a solution that minimises any kind of damage to the property."

Built for commercial purposes by Romanian Jew Isaac Ellison in 1924, the building at the junction of Selegie Road and Rochor Canal Road was gazetted for conservation in 2008. In August 2016, news broke of its partial demolition and reconstruction.

The heritage community ap-

pealed against the decision, while questioning the efficacy of a conservation gazette if it could be so easily overridden. Furthermore, reconstruction, argued experts, was "the falsification of historical artefacts".

Two months later, the LTA said it would engage a conservation specialist to advise on how best to minimise the impact of upcoming tunnel works on the historic building.

Mr Desmond Lee, who was then the Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and National Development, told Parliament that the Government would finalise its plans for the building after discussions with heritage groups.

Mr Isaac Ellison's grandson, Mr Steven Ellison, 68, is a development consultant based in Australia. He told The Straits Times he was relieved by the turn of events. "Once destroyed, we can only speak of heritage structures in memory, so I appreciate the careful consideration taken for this building," he said.

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The fate of People's Park Complex hangs in the balance, given the collective sale fever. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Going, going, gone?

Heritage group proposes measures to prolong life of post-independence buildings

Melody Zaccheus
Heritage and Community Correspondent

When Pearl Bank Apartments, People's Park Complex and Golden Mile Complex were completed in the 1970s, they were considered bold, innovative pieces of architecture.

Yet in just over 40 years, the buildings, which sit on prime land in the Chinatown and Beach Road areas, may soon be torn down.

With the looming threat of envelope fever and demolition, heritage experts here fear that the Republic's modernist post-1965 landmarks – designed by pioneering local architects – may never get a chance to be conserved.

Following the sale of Pearl Bank Apartments in February and the collective sales attempts for Golden Mile Complex and People's Park Complex, the Singapore Heritage Society (SHS) is releasing a position paper today proposing a

slow of measures to lengthen the lifespan of buildings.

Called "Too Young to Die: Giving New Lease of Life to Singapore's Modernist Icons", the paper will be submitted to the Ministry of National Development, Urban Redevelopment Authority and National Heritage Board later this month.

The society, comprising heritage advocates, architects and historians, is recommending introducing regulations requiring building management corporations to develop and implement long-term maintenance plans – to prevent buildings from neglect – instead of ad hoc, piecemeal ones.

"Singapore's shophouses used to be rundown," said Dr Chua Ai Lin, SHS' executive director. "Few people thought they were worth keeping. But after they were restored and conserved, perspectives and impressions changed."

"Now they are highly valued, viewed as treasures which command sky-high prices, and are a key feature of our landscape."



Pearl Bank Apartments (middle) is likely to be demolished, while Golden Mile Complex (above) will be put up for sale on bloc. FILE PHOTOS: LIANHE ZHAOBAO, ST

The paper cites how the Housing Board and town councils here successfully manage old estates, such as Tiong Bahru, by conducting periodic overhauls of lifts, pipes and waterproofing. This results in high-functioning, liveable homes with strong resale prices.

Heritage conservation expert Ho Weng Hin, who contributed to the paper, highlighted that Singapore has yet to conserve any post-independence strata-title buildings.

He said: "As Singapore matures as a nation, we need to move to-

wards a new generation of monuments and heritage structures from our more recent past."

To facilitate this process, Mr Ho believes existing laws and policies that impact the upkeep, lease extension and rehabilitation potential of these buildings will need to be re-examined and tweaked. These include the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act and Stamp Duties Act.

For instance, the SHS recommends lowering the percentage approval required for the redistribution of strata-title ownership shares from 100 per cent to a more achievable 80 per cent. This is on a par with the percentage required for the collective sale of buildings over 10 years old. This was the technical issue which prevented Pearl Bank Apartments' application for voluntary conservation in 2015 from going through.

The SHS also recommends bolder planning incentives for developers and building owners. Suggestions include offering greater bonus gross floor area and more flexible re-zoning options to encourage rehabilitation and conservation of these sites.

Dr Chua added that the paper primarily sets out to demonstrate that successful collective sales do not mean the end of historic buildings for Singapore.

For instance, another recommendation revolves around encouraging the architectural fraternity to propose alternative plans for building rehabilitation and possible change of use.

She said: "We strongly encourage owners or developers to envision a future for the building based on retention and regeneration. Demolition is not the only option."

The recommendations will be part of a month-long series of programmes and exhibitions set up by the SHS and The Substation – an independent contemporary arts centre – that will run till Sept 23.

The activities have been designed to increase public awareness of the subject and encourage better understanding of the merits of the structures which have made the news this year.

The public outreach is timely, given that an Institute of Policy Studies' Social Lab preliminary study in June found that only a fraction of people surveyed found Pearl Bank Apartments important. Residents also said they did not find the building's design particularly special and preferred cashing out.

MOM removes maid from employer's home after complaint

Ng Huwien

A maid who alleged she was mistreated at her employer's Bukit Timah home has been taken away by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), which is currently investigating her claims.

Another maid who works for the household has also been removed, MOM said yesterday.

The first woman told citizen journalism website Stomp last Tuesday that she had been sleeping in the backyard of her employer's home in Sian Tian Avenue with the other maid since July 31.

According to the maid, her employer had said their bedrooms were not ready.

The 40-year-old, who said she was employed in June, said the family had just moved into their new home. She also made several complaints against her employer regarding her duties, work hours, food allowances and doctor visits.

In response to queries, MOM said its officers immediately inspected the household to verify the claims made by the maid after it was alerted to the case by Stomp. Investigations are ongoing, the ministry said.

"MOM has also removed the two foreign domestic workers from the household," it added.

In its statement, MOM said maids who face issues with their employment should raise the matter with their employer.

If they are unable to reach a resolution, the maid should report the matter to MOM.

She can also contact the Centre for Domestic Employees for help.

Those who have information on foreign domestic worker infringements can also file a report with MOM. All information received will be kept strictly confidential, MOM said.

nghuwien@sph.com.sg

WHERE TO GET HELP

MINISTRY OF MANPOWER

Telephone: 6438-5122

Website: <https://www.mom.gov.sg>

For: Maids who face issues with their employers

Those who have information on domestic worker infringements

Centre for Domestic Employees

Helpline: 1800-2255-233 (24 hours)

Website: <http://cde.org.sg>

For: Maids in need of help.

melody2@sph.com.sg

Losing its lustre: The Golden Mile dilemma

While most of the people who own commercial units support a collective sale, there are more residents who do not want to sell their units. Meanwhile, some architects and historians hope the iconic building will be conserved

By Ko Lyn Cheang

ANDE Lai has a great view at home. He bought his two-bedroom apartment in Golden Mile Complex in 1986 with this view in mind.

Standing on his 14th floor balcony, he could see the old national stadium. At low tide, he could smell the ocean.

He hoped that moving closer to his photography shop, which he ran out of the first floor of the building with his wife, would allow him to spend more time with his one-year-old daughter.

This was before Golden Mile Complex itself and three other post-independence landmarks were under threat of demolition.

The owners of each building have begun the search for a buyer who will take over the building from the current occupants.

"For these buildings, we are at an inflexion point in time," said Karen Tan, the founder of an independent cinema in Golden Mile Tower. She acknowledged that there may be economic reasons to sell and demolish the buildings, but questioned the decision on a personal level: "How do you factor in all the intangible things? The history, the heritage, its relevance to the city and people's identity."

In the decade after gaining its independence, Singapore changed rapidly. People moved out of congested shophouses or kampongs and into new apartments.

Golden Mile Complex, with its iconic stepped form, emerged as a symbol of this rapid national development. The building synthesised the prevailing international architectural aesthetic with a young nation's ambitions of urban renewal.

"This (landscape that represented an era) is what we are trying to safeguard for the future generation, because you only go through nation-building once," Ho Weng Hin, a conservation architect, said.

Golden Mile Complex was completed in 1973, and its sister building Golden Mile Tower, located next door, was completed a year later. Some long-time business owners still occupy their units today, but little else has remained the same for this Brutalist icon.

In 2006, a politician described Golden Mile Complex as a "vertical slum" and a "national disgrace". Years of poor maintenance, low occupancy and low rent had caused the building's physical state to deteriorate.

Mr Ho explained that the physical decline of Golden Mile Complex stems from its status as a strata-title leasehold property, which



The physical decline of Golden Mile Complex stems from its status as a strata-title leasehold property, which means that the building has hundreds of individual owners. BT FILE PHOTO

means that the building has hundreds of individual owners.

At the start of the lease, everyone pools money into a fund, known as a sinking fund, which is used for building repairs. But there is no mechanism for the sinking fund to maintain the cash flow. Over time, the money dries up. The shared swimming pool has long been drained and lies unused, abandoned. Pipes often leak into residents' bedrooms and balconies.

Individual owners embarked on DIY construction projects, covering their balconies with corrugated sheet metal, marring the iconic stepped facade of the building.

Many owners make money by renting out their units. But because the rental value of the space is very low, it is hard to make a living

this way. On the other hand, the building sits on prime real estate, well-located in the city centre, and could sell for a higher price.

While the vast majority of people who own commercial units support a collective sale, Mr Lai said that there are more residents who do not want to sell their units.

For one, residents expect that there will be a disparity in the payout for residential and commercial owners.

Mr Lai, who is on the collective sale committee for Golden Mile Complex, said that the en bloc price will be about S\$1,400 per square foot for an apartment unit.

But shop owners like James Ang, who owns a stationery and insurance business in Golden Mile Tower, predict the commercial unit en bloc price will be at least S\$2,000 per

square foot, if not more.

Many residents are tenants who have little say over the fate of the building. Others find themselves in the minority of homeowners unwilling to sell their homes.

For each of the four buildings to be sold, there needs to be a consensus among owners holding 80 per cent of the building's share value and area. As long as the 80 per cent agree to sell, minority homeowners will be silenced.

Some people, particularly architects and historians like Mr Ho and Chang Jiat-Hwee, a professor of modern architecture at the National University of Singapore, hope that the government will take steps to protect the building from being demolished by designating it for conservation.

"The (Urban Redevelopment Authority) is open to explore win-win solutions with owners of private modern buildings that have merit for conservation," Kelvin Ang, director of conservation management at the Urban Redevelopment Authority, said in an email.

But what does a win-win solution look like in the seemingly zero-sum world of real estate?

Tan Cheng Siong, a pioneering architect who designed Pearl Bank Apartments, offered voluntary conservation as a possible answer.

For the past three years, he has worked with residents of the Pearl Bank Apartments to create an owner-led development plan, which would allow architects and consultants to work with owners to rejuvenate and upgrade the building.

But the plan fell through. Mr Tan had obtained the consent of 93 per cent of residents, but proposals for voluntary conservation that will involve alterations to the building require a 100 per cent consensus among owners.

A more organic and long-term solution would be to let the building gain stature and importance in the public eye over time.

Mr Ho made an analogy to Singapore's shophouses. "In the past we didn't romanticise shophouses as heritage because everyone living in them was in dire condition. But we took a step back, decided to conserve them, and now they are much coveted buildings," he said. He thinks that there is a similar potential for enhancing the value of Golden Mile.

The phenomenon has already begun. In recent years, the Golden Mile buildings have been revitalised as young entrepreneurs and creatives take advantage of the low rent and generous space available in the building to set up creative design studios, bars and Singapore's first independent cinema, The Projector.

Ms Tan is optimistic about the conservation possibilities for the Golden Mile buildings. "I think there is an opportunity here," she said. "It's not straightforward how one can unlock it ... but that doesn't mean it's not worth trying to do it."

■ This is a shortened version of an article that was first published in the September issue of Yale Daily News Magazine, the oldest college daily newspaper in the United States. The writer is a Singaporean and can be contacted at kolyn.cheang@yale.edu

FORUM

Govt makes call on what to gazette as heritage

The tangible heritage of a society includes buildings, historic places and monuments. What constitutes Singapore heritage is decided by our National Heritage Board (NHB).

Unesco describes cultural heritage as “the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.”

Again from Unesco: “Objects are important to the study of human history because they provide a concrete basis for ideas, and can validate them.”

Unesco also talks about the reality of the risks that tangible items of heritage get destroyed “not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions...”.

Unesco notes that the “deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world”.

This is why the world decried the destruction of the 6th-7th century Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan in 2001 and the 2015 bombing of Palmyra’s Temple of Bel in Syria.

Yes, the actions were made by Islamic militants, but the point is

that they acted according to their religious beliefs.

So here are instances of a clash between what an institution decides as heritage that should not be destroyed and personal values of societies who feel that they should decide on monuments that are within their communities.

We are not discussing a World Heritage Site when we consider 38, Oxley Road, but certainly we are discussing Singapore heritage.

In other words, the decision to gazette a monument is the purview of government and is not a personal decision of individuals.

This means, an owner of a property may not resist the gazetting of the site if NHB, guided by the minister of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, deems the site to be part of Singapore’s heritage.

This decision considers heritage as belonging to all Singaporeans, extending beyond the lifetimes of individuals who have interest in the property.

I am sure many Singaporeans, including me, will find themselves emotionally pained if the wishes of our founding father as set out in his will are disregarded, however, at the same time, we must respect the decision of NHB with regard to the preservation of Singapore heritage.

Margaret Chan (Assoc Professor)
Singapore Management University

What is the drill in the event of fire in HDB point block?

Watching the London tower block on fire was horrifying. I understand that the fire started on the lower floors and quickly spread to the upper ones.

There is only one exit route in the tower and people trapped inside were asked to stay in their apartments as there was no other way to escape from the fire.

In Singapore, there are many 25-storey HDB point blocks (similar to the London Tower Block) with only one exit route in a block.

In the unfortunate event that something similar happens in an HDB point block, can the relevant authorities advise what the evacuation process for people trapped in the upper floors is?

Should the residents head for the roof top of the block, can that be used as an emergency exit and can people be rescued from there by helicopter?

Can the Housing Board, the Singapore Civil Defence Force or the relevant authorities educate HDB residents on what they should do in the event of a fire?

Goh Geok Leong

Athletes, sports associations must work hand in hand

I was disappointed to read about how Winona Howe, who topped the Triathlon Association of Singapore (TAS) SEA Games

PLANNING ACT

(CHAPTER 232)

(Original Enactment: Act 3 of 1998)

REVISED EDITION 1998

(15th December 1998)

Conservation areas

9.—(1) Where in the opinion of the Minister any area is of special architectural, historic, traditional or aesthetic interest, the Minister may approve under section 8 a proposal to amend the Master Plan to designate the area as a conservation area.

(2) A conservation area may comprise —

- (a) an area;
- (b) a single building; or
- (c) a group of buildings.

PRESERVATION OF MONUMENTS ACT

(CHAPTER 239)

(Original Enactment: Act 16 of 2009)

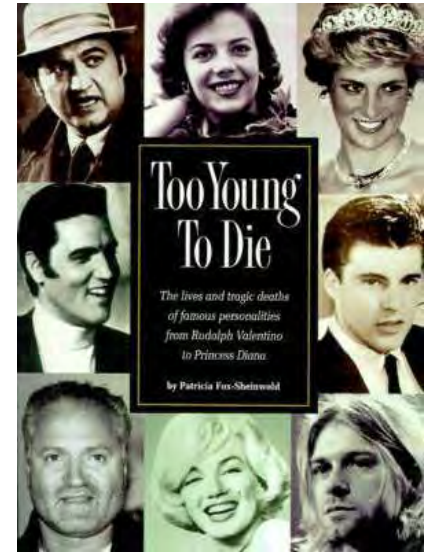
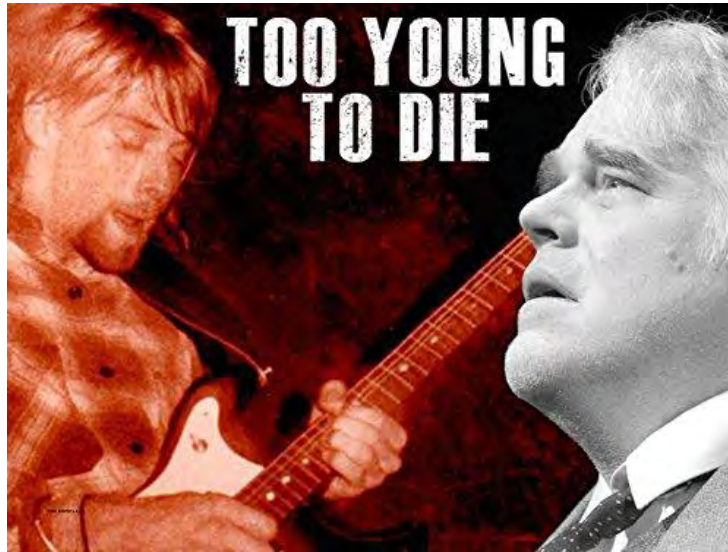
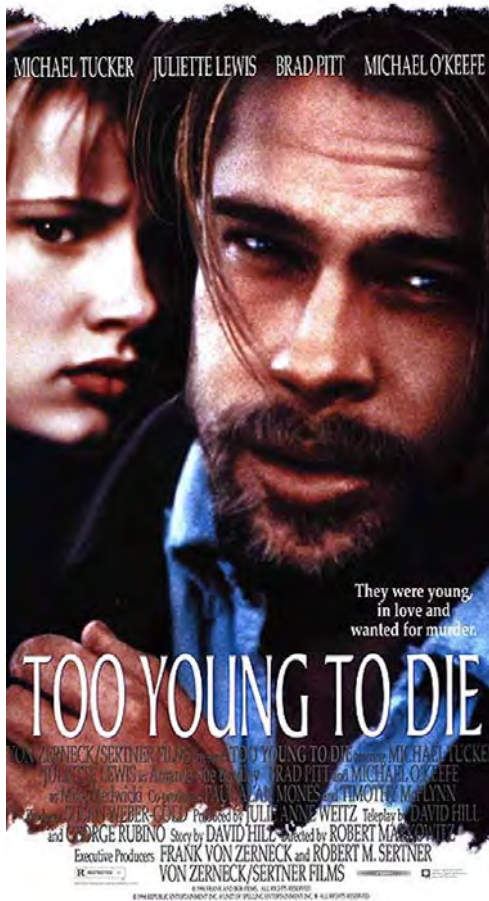
REVISED EDITION 2011

(31st December 2011)

Functions of Board under this Act

4. Without prejudice to section 6 of the National Heritage Board Act (Cap. 196A), the functions of the Board under this Act shall be —

- (a) to identify monuments that are of such historic, cultural, traditional, archaeological, architectural, artistic or symbolic significance and national importance as to be worthy of preservation under this Act, and to make recommendations to the Minister for the preservation under this Act of the monuments so identified;



TOO YOUNG TO DIE

GIVING NEW LEASE OF LIFE TO SINGAPORE'S MODERNIST ICONS

the Substation
A Space for the Arts

SINGAPORE HERITAGE SOCIETY



Photo Credits: Darren Soh



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What is Heritage Impact Assessment?

“A process of identifying, predicting, evaluating and communicating the probable effects of a current or proposed development policy or action on the cultural life, institutions and resources of communities, then integrating the findings and conclusions into the planning and decision-making process, with a view to mitigating adverse impacts and enhancing positive outcomes.”

International Association of Impact Assessment IAIA

What is the status of Heritage Impact Assessment in the region?

Most HIA in the region are carried out as the result of requirements from international funding agencies such as World Bank and Asian Development Bank;

Or as a result of direct requests to States Parties from the World Heritage Committee;

Some are initiated by local NGOs or heritage protection organizations in response to either governmental or private developer proposals.

Out of ASEAN + 3 Countries (PRC, Japan and Korea) only Thailand and Hong Kong have legislations on impact assessment of heritage

Thailand – Historical site, archaeological site, traditional custom, culture fall under under EIA (Quality of Life); no details or technical requirements


Hong Kong – Requirement of EIA process; enforced

The Heritage Manager's Most Important Tool for Managing Change in Historic Resources

Ensuring the continuity and continued relevance of culture in the community;

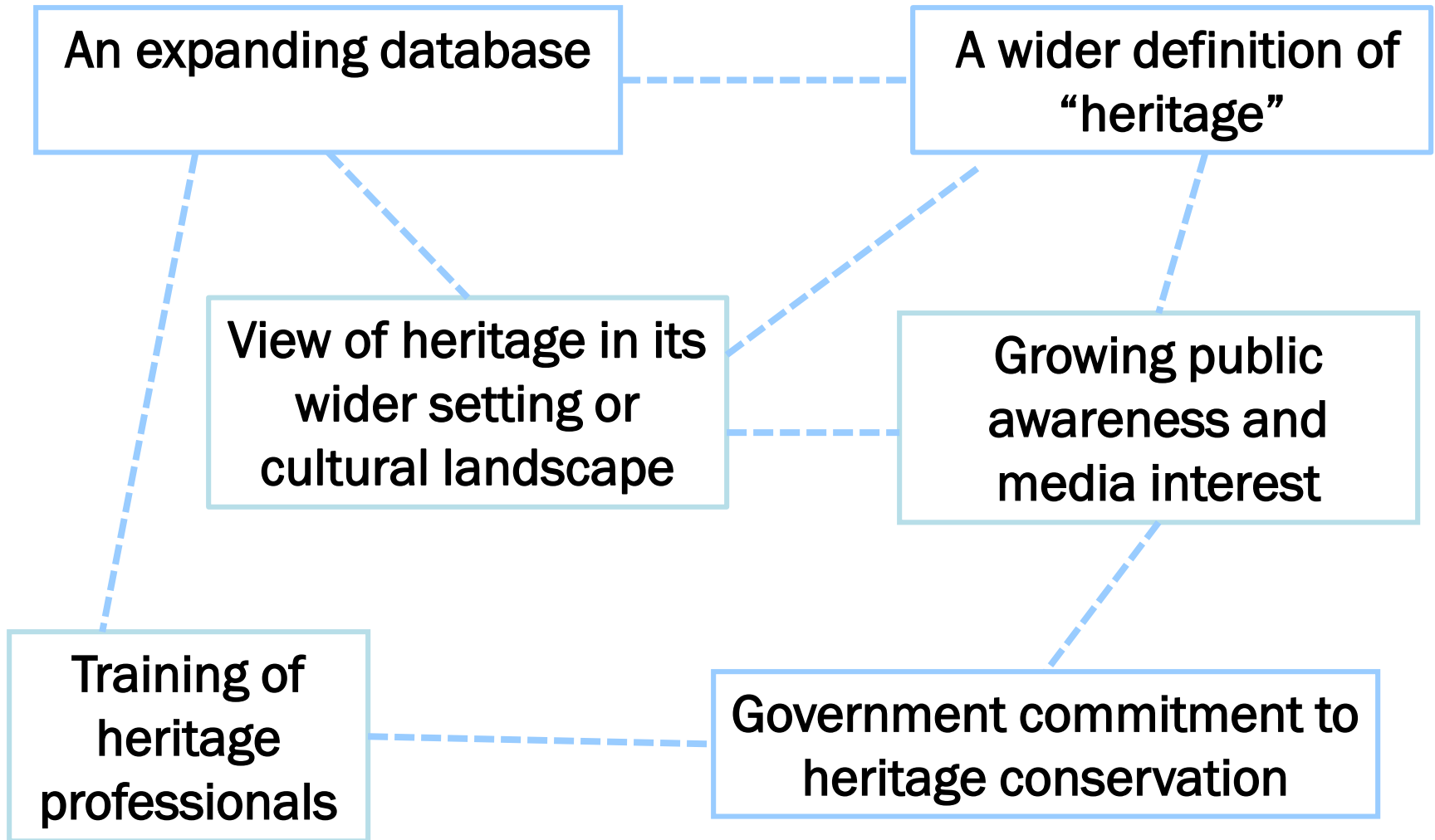
Protecting cultural assets from exploitation, mis-use and degradation

- Provides information for decision makers;
- Involves stakeholders;
- Bring policies and stakeholders together (partnership);
- Assists policy development (addresses many policy making requirements);



**1st Step and most important
Step:**

Assessment of Significance



Crisis in management !



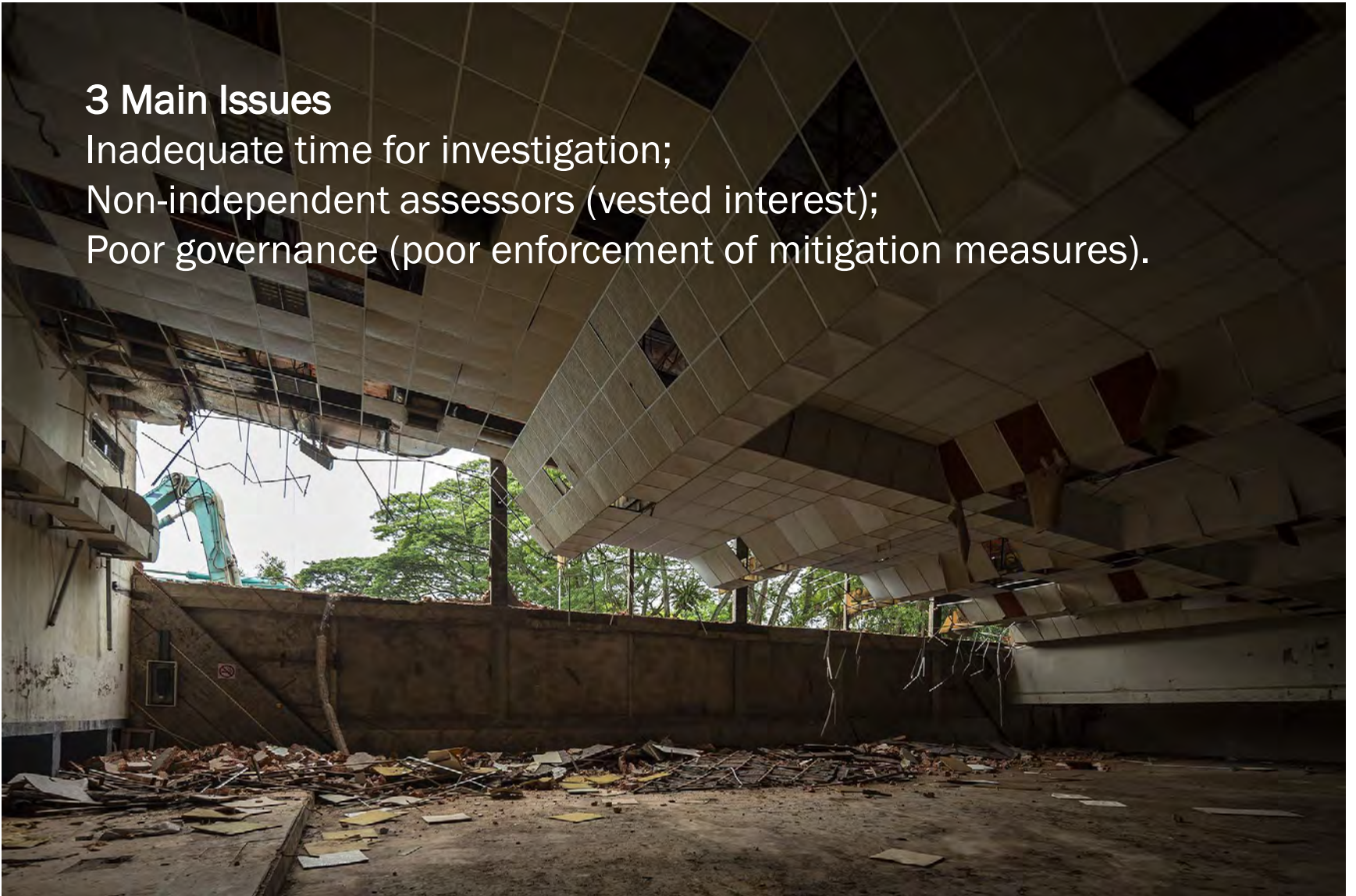
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3 Main Issues

Inadequate time for investigation;

Non-independent assessors (vested interest);

Poor governance (poor enforcement of mitigation measures).





**Transparency of Assessments;
Allow public (not just direct stakeholders) to comment;
Get involved in heritage work.**

Thank you!