



MISC. HERITAGE NEWS – May-June-July 2016

Heritage portfolio in the new Sarawak State Government - A new State cabinet (8 Ministers and 18 Assistant Ministers) was appointed shortly after the May election. Deputy Chief Minister **Datuk Amar Abang Haji Abdul Rahman Zohari Bin Tun Abang Haji Openg** is **Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture** and Minister of Housing and Urbanization. **Datuk John Sikie anak Tayai** is his **Assistant Minister for Native Laws and Customs and for Arts and Culture**.

Heritage matters thus reverted from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the ministry in charge of tourism, as it was a few year ago.

The Barisan National coalition, which won the election by a large margin, had in its manifesto a commitment to “**preserve the Sarawak culture, heritage and beliefs**”. [[“Adenan unveils 15-point manifesto”](#) New Straits Times online, 26 Apr. 2016].

India Street facelift - the Kuching North City Commission (DBKU, Kuching North municipality) will get funding from the Government to **clean and repaint the** shops of the newly arcade-covered India Street, announced the Minister of Tourism. “*We want India Street to be like those in Singapore where the old architecture is preserved. This is a heritage area and we will upgrade the buildings in this street*”, he said. He also urged to rectify the gradient problem that the arcade structure is reported to have. India Street’s steel and glass roof arcade is a Sarawak Government RM 4.3mil project. “*After this, we will look at what we can do in Carpenter Street. This will be extended to Gambier Street and Main Bazaar as a heritage area to attract tourists*”, the Minister added. [[“Heritage upscale from India Street, says Abg Jo”](#) Borneo Post online, 5 July 2016 and [“Shops in India Street set to be upgraded”](#) The Star online, 6 July 2016]

Funding for the restoration of 5 of 14 remaining Brooke era Forts - RM3.5mil for **Fort Hose (Marudi)**; RM5mil for **Fort Lili (Betong)**, RM5mil for **Fort Emma (Kanowit)**, RM5mil for **Fort Brooke (Julau)** and RM1.5mil for **Fort Sylvia (Kapit)**. “Under the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP), the [Sarawak Museum] department had been allocated RM25 million to conserve, develop and build a few more museums in some of the unoccupied old forts” to include the above and **Fort Brooke in Meluan**, reported The Star. [[“Sarawak to restore five more historical forts”](#) The Star online, 16 June 2016; [“Develop heritage sites to boost tourism – Lee”](#) Borneo Post, 26 June 2016].

Miri to have more gazetted heritage sites- Shortly after his appointment, the new Assistant Minister of Tourism (tourism), identified several assets for listing : The “**Rando/Jais’ building** (Resident and District offices and Islamic Religious Department), to become cultural and heritage museum; the **Government Resthouse** at Tanjung Lobang (Resident’s house during British rule); the **Miri Light house**, Tanjong Lobang (where the Japanese landed during the World War II, and a rest place for some war victims) and two other graveyards: the **Memorial Park near SMK St Columba** (resting place of some 20 victims of the Japanese during the war) and **Makam Datuk Permaisuri**; and **Piasau Bridge**. He added: “*To complement the bridge, Shell had been asked to conserve at least three houses in the newly gazetted Piasau Nature Reserve,*” “*Miri has only two [sites] on the heritage list – the Oil Well No. 1 and the Japanese War Tunnel beneath Canada Hill*” he said. [[“Develop heritage sites to boost tourism – Lee”](#) Borneo Post, 26 June 2016; [“Earmarked as heritage building”](#) The Star online, 25 June 2016].

The **plundering of a WW2 Japanese shipwreck off Santubong** by metal salvagers in early 2016



"A diver surveys a forlorn landscape of twisted metal structures, debris and rubble – all that is left of the WWII Japanese shipwreck Katori Maru after it was targeted by rogue metal salvag-ers last March" Photo credit: diver Valerie Chai, published in Borneo Post 28 May 2016.

has drawn the Government and the public's attention to the issue of protecting Sarawak underwater cultural heritage. The vulnerability of the WW2 shipwrecks was well known but they have so far not been gazetted as heritage sites and are therefore not protected. The case highlighted the shortcomings of the existing Sarawak Cultural Heritage ordinance 1993 in dealing with underwater heritage. It has led to a proposal to intervene through the regulations on natural heritage, by extending the perimeter of Talang/Satang and/or Santubong National Parks to include the maritime area which houses the shipwrecks.

[["Historical WW II shipwreck destroyed by metal salvagers"](#) Borneo Post, 28 May 2016 ; ["Mulling policy to better protect Sarawak's underwater heritage"](#) Borneo Post, 3 June 2016].

The shipwreck case also led the Sarawak Museum Department (SMD) to say that it was **reviewing the Sarawak Cultural Heritage ordinance 1993 for amendments**. *"We call the community to play a greater role in supporting the department's efforts in protecting and promoting Sarawak's precious and vulnerable historic environment"*, added a SMD officer. [["Museum Dept to discuss conservation of heritage assets"](#) Borneo Post, 1 June 2016];

A plan to redevelop Kuching's **Brooke Dockyards** (which had been previously announced to become a maritime museum) into a **handicraft business and training centre**, was announced by the Sarawak Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture. "Besides becoming a hub for local entrepreneurs to sell handicrafts and souvenir items, the proposed centre would also have training centres to teach locals to produce local handicrafts (...) Abang Johari added that the transformation of the former Brooke Dockyard would complement his ministry's initiative to have a heritage trail from Kuching Waterfront and encircling heritage sites such as Brooke Dockyard, the first state mosque (now divisional mosque), SJK (C) Chung Hua School No. 4, Darul Kurnia and Jalan P. Ramlee", the Borneo Post reported the Minister saying. He also mentioned that the national budget has granted a **RM 6 million allocation for the project and referred to Kuala Lumpur's 'Pasar Seni' (Central Market) as a model**. [["RM6 mln to transform dockyard - Abg Jo"](#), Borneo Post online, 26 July 2016].

The **Reservoir Park, Kuching** will be redeveloped and rebranded as "Unity Park". It is to portray Sarawak's ethnic diversity. The design has been entrusted to Kuching North City Commission (DBKU). A workshop to discuss the project has been announced for early August. Mention was made of a proposal to extend the park to include an adjacent Government building which would become a restaurant. [["Ministry, MBKS and DBKU agree to jointly organise Unity Seminar Festival"](#) Borneo Post online, 27 Jul 2016 and "Workshop to formulate proposal for Reservoir park,

Borneo post, 29 July 2016]. [The Reservoir Park houses the gazetted WW2 Air Raid Shelters and is adjacent to the old Hokkien School, a surviving high heritage value building].

The **Sarawak Arts Council** will be revived “to develop [Sarawak’s] existing arts and heritage” and to promote them abroad. [[“Abg Jo proposes to revive S’wak Arts Council”](#) Borneo Post online, 18 July 2016; [“Sarawak Arts Council set to promote state’s arts, heritage globally”](#), Borneo Post online, 24 July 2016]

Also noted:

Songket weaving - Tanoti House, Kuching, was in the news at the occasion of a visit by Malaysia’s Minister of Tourism and Culture. Tanoti focuses on the production and promotion of traditional Malay songket hand woven textiles in Sarawak. Originally a foundation, it is now a private enterprise. [[“Nurture craft of Sarawak songket weaving”](#), Borneo Post, 4 June 2016]

An article on **Sri Aman’s natural and cultural heritage**: the tidal bore (which has become a surfing event); the recently restored Fort Alice (to which the Sarawak Heritage Society contributed) and associated cultural events. [[“Sri Aman rides the wave of natural phenomenon”](#), The Star online, 6 June 2016]

Visitors’ extravaganzas for Sarawak traditional cuisine: *“There are very rich people from Far East countries, such as from Hong Kong, who are willing to spend a hefty sum of money in order to enjoy something special. I know of these Hong Kong super-rich who charter private jets to fly to Sarawak just to eat the freshwater empurau fish. They fly in after making prior arrangements with certain restaurants for the best empurau. They willingly pay a hefty sum for the fish and after their dinner, they fly back home again.”* said the Assistant Minister of Tourism at a function. He also mentioned Sarawak’s other traditional dishes, and its birds’ nests production. [[“Sarawak boasts world-class products”](#) The Star online, 29 July 2016].