

Group meets PM to raise concerns over damage to heritage sites

THE committee for "Preserve Jalan Sultan and Jalan Bukit Bintang" held a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak recently to address public concerns of inevitable damage to the heritage property.

The committee requested the prime minister to withdraw the compulsory land acquisition process which has imposed great uncertainty and despair to the owners in Jalan Sultan and Jalan Bukit Bintang.

The panel stressed that they were neither against development, nor against the government. They are concerned that a mega project of this nature was lacking ethical public consultation, without in-depth social impact assessment and non-transpar-

ency in project management.

Among the issues discussed at the meeting were:

- The committee emphasised that Jalan Sultan is within the heritage zone identified earlier in the Kuala Lumpur 2020 Master Plan.

Preserving the heritage site is vital as it is an important chapter in the history and social development of the country. As no expert is able to guarantee underground tunnelling work will not undermine the stability of the buildings, realignment of the MRT route makes sense.

Najib acknowledged the request and advised that engagement of an independent and maybe an international consultant to verify the soil

condition in the Jalan Sultan area.

- An alternative MRT route along Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lok and Jalan Pudu to avoid damage to property and keep compulsory acquisition of the buildings properties out of context, was presented to Najib.

The committee also suggested that a MRT station be built at the long abandoned "Plaza Rakyat" site so as to revive the half-completed project.

The proposed Plaza Rakyat station could be connected with the proposed 102-storey Warisan Merdeka building in Jalan Hang Jebat with underground concourse with food and retail stalls.

- As for Jalan Bukit Bintang, which is an important tourist hub and entertainment landmark, a closure of seven

years for the construction of a MRT station at Jalan Sultan Ismail and Jalan Bukit Bintang junction is disastrous.

- The delegation informed the prime minister that the amalgamation of the two originally planned MRT stations, BB West and BB East into BB Central located opposite Maybank and BB plaza is not appropriate due to socio-economic, environmental and historic considerations.

Demolition of historic tourist landmarks will marginalise Bukit Bintang as an entertainment and shopping centre. The adjoining tourist hotspots like Jalan Alor, Thong Shin, Jalan Changkat Bukit Bintang and Sg Wang Complex and BB Plaza that generate more than three million visitors per

month will also be badly affected.

It was suggested the two stations should be built with one at the open car park opposite the Royale Bintang Hotel and the other at the end of Jalan Bukit Bintang as originally planned.

Najib advised that he will meet with MRT Corp to seek a solution to the issues. He also clearly stated that there is no necessity for the owners to meet MRT Corp for now.

Present at the meeting were the president and the secretary-general of the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, Tan Yew Sing and Stanley Yong Yew Wei, the owners' representatives Jimmy Chok from Jalan Sultan, and Datuk Chong Peng Wah from Jalan Bukit Bintang.