

PRIME NEWS

Lenggong Valley declared World Heritage site

GLOBAL RECOGNITION: Unesco approves Malaysia's fifth World Heritage site

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IT was the moment he had been waiting for when the news broke out that Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) had declared Lenggong Valley as a World Heritage site.

Prof Mokhtar Saidin, the director of the Centre for Global Archaeological Research (CGAR) at Universiti Sains Malaysia, could not help but heave a sigh of relief at the culmination of more than 25 years of hard work.

"I've had sleepless nights and yesterday was one of the most anxious days in my life," he said, following the announcement by Minister of Information, Communications and Culture Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim yesterday.

Mokhtar was a member of the archaeological team which dis-

covered the paleolithic site in Lenggong Valley and the Perak Man, which was unearthed in 1991, the first complete human skeleton so far discovered in Southeast Asia.

The team was led by Heritage Commissioner Pro Emeritus Datin Paduka Zuraina Majid, then a lecturer at USM.

The discovery of the 11,000 year-old skeleton sparked a nationwide interest on the archaeological traces in the valley.

Mokhtar said the recognition would create a massive socio-economic spin-off for Lenggong Valley and Perak as a whole, adding that it would spur efforts to conduct more archaeological research in the valley.

He, however reminded his team members that this was just the beginning, and that there were bigger tasks ahead to maintain the status.

"We need the cooperation of all

parties, from the federal and state governments down to the villagers, district office, tourism officials and such to preserve Lenggong Valley and ensure it remains as a World Heritage site," he said.

Rais, who said Unesco had informed him of the news on Friday, described it as a significant and meaningful achievement.

Speaking at the Malaysia Community programme at Kampung Penanti, he said the discovery of the ancient artefacts dating more than 11,000 years old from excavations at the valley by archaeologists over the past 20 years had led to the declaration.

Rais added that the ministry would collate and record all the data related to the discoveries to provide more information to the public.

He also said the ministry and the Perak government would look into a joint study on Lenggong Valley's socio, cultural and heritage development.

Unesco had earlier recognised Penang, Malacca, Mount Kinabalu and Mount Ni-ah as the first four World Heritage sites for Malaysia.

Lenggong Valley is a precious archaeological site where several evidence of human settlement from the palaeolithic age were found.

Among the archaeological sites are Kota Tampan, Bukit Jawa at Kampung Gelok and Kampung Teme-long.

Last year, Prof Mokhtar and his team made a new discovery in Bukit Bunuh, which could lead to changes in the earlier theories of pre-historic human movement and settlement in Peninsular Malaysia.

"We need the cooperation of all parties... to preserve Lenggong Valley and ensure it remains as a World Heritage site."

Prof Mokhtar Saidin
director, Centre for Global Archaeological Research, Universiti Sains Malaysia