

## KERATAN AKHBAR



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# 'Step up Lenggong Valley protection'

## Groups call for better management or risk losing world heritage status

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The deterioration of the Lenggong Valley archaeological site in Hulu Perak should have been recognised and highlighted during the Periodic Reporting exercise, one of the core conservation monitoring mechanisms of the World Heritage Convention.

Badan Warisan Malaysia past president, Elizabeth Cardoso, said according to Unesco's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) operational guidelines, the periodic reporting exercise was to be undertaken by state parties every six years and submitted to the World Heritage Committee.

"Since its inscription in 2012, there should have been a periodic reporting exercise in either 2017 or 2018.

"If the reporting took place, what was the outcome of the exercise and were these issues picked up in the report?" she said, adding that the exercise would involve the National Heritage Department (NHD), the Perak state government, as well as



**Bad maintenance:** A dilapidated shelter and informational point at one of the caves in Lenggong Valley.

an expert panel.

"Yes, there are jurisdictional issues, but the federal and state parties must come to the table and work on these collectively.

"When the site was submitted for inscription, the NHD, which was designated as the responsible agency for the properties on the Unesco world heritage list, was obligated to

accept the responsibility for ensuring that the outstanding universal values that the site is inscribed for are maintained, enhanced and supported by the state and Federal Government.

The Star reported on Saturday that the archaeological sites of Lenggong Valley could be in danger of losing its Unesco World Heritage

status as they were not properly maintained.

Meanwhile, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos) Malaysia said all parties involved must step up and take the lead to preserve its significance.

In a posting on its website, Icomos stated that well-designed public facilities and interpretive content would foster greater appreciation among visitors towards the site's outstanding universal values.

"This in fact prompted the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) and NHD to organise an architecture idea competition for a visitor centre in Lenggong Valley in 2013, though none of the winning ideas were implemented.

"Visit Malaysia 2020 should draw much international interest to Lenggong Valley.

"However, the neglect of archaeological sites within the valley, as reported in *The Star*, is regretted.

"Broken roofs, overgrown vegetation and run-down infrastructure impress upon us that its management lacks adequate funding needed to upkeep and sustain the site in a consistent manner," Icomos said. It added that if adequate funding

was indeed provided for, the situation then most likely stemmed from poor management and weak coordination of its long-term plans.

"It has been seven years since Lenggong Valley's listing. Frameworks for implementation have been spelled out in its Conservation Management Plan and other documents, all according to Unesco standards and guidelines.

"What would it take to accomplish this? Take the Toba Ash site at Bukit Sapi as an example — only a small portion is preserved, and a school has been built right next to it.

"The reality is that the archaeological sites are deteriorating and immediate action must be taken to rectify all problems, including the issue of jurisdiction and governance of the heritage sites in the valley," it said.

Icomos urged relevant parties from both the federal and state governments to provide equal priority to funding as it affected maintenance, infrastructure, promotion and research as a whole.

It added that in the meantime, an interim management plan based on currently available funds could be conceived.