

CM: Demolition of heritage building was necessary

NATION

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Controversial project: The heritage building was torn down last year to make way for the IMC.

GEORGE TOWN: The heritage building at the corner of Peel Avenue and Peirce Lane had to be torn down as it was in a dilapidated state, says Chow Kon Yeow.

The Chief Minister said the Class II heritage building had caved in and had to be demolished to make way for the Island Medical City (IMC) project.

The approval for the demolition was given by the Penang Island City Council (MBPP), he said, adding that the building was torn down at the end of last year.

“There is no specific requirement on the conservation of Class II heritage buildings,” he told a press conference yesterday.

“The project developer has also received the approval to demolish three other government quarters for the project. These demolitions can be done anytime,” Chow said.

In a Facebook posting on Monday, Penang Heritage Trust vice-president Khoo Salma Nasution questioned the demolition.

“Although a state heritage enactment was passed in 2011, it has not been used to protect any buildings.

“Although our government is basking in the glory of Unesco recognition, there is no political will even to protect its own buildings. How sad is that,” she wrote.

This is not the first time that the IMC project had courted controversy. Opposition to the project began when it was given without an open tender in May last year.

Former Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng had claimed that the RM2bil prime state land went to Island Hospital because it was treated as a foreign direct investment in a high-value industry.



A scale model of the IMC building.

There had been vehement opposition to the project from Gerakan and other NGOs when the Citizens Awareness Group Chant divulged to the press that about 3ha of prime land along Peel Avenue – the size of four football fields – would be developed.

The ground-breaking ceremony of IMC, purported to be the biggest medical hub in Malaysia, was held on Sunday.

The project, with a gross development value close to RM2bil, will take five years to complete. Phase one is expected to be done by 2021.

It will see 300 more hospital beds being added onto Island Hospital's current 300, making it Penang's first 600-bed private hospital.

To complement its functions and meet healthcare travellers' demands, medical suites, ancillary facilities and a medical tourist hotel will be built later.

Island Hospital chief executive officer Mark Wee said the long-term plan was to hit a capacity of 1,000 beds.

"The first phase of IMC will create 2,000 jobs, including 100 medical specialists.

"We will spend close to RM2bil to make IMC a state-of-the-art hospital and medical city," he said before the ground-breaking ceremony.

"The economic value is expected to exceed RM7bil."

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Island Hospital Chow Kon Yeow International Medical City