

100-YEAR-OLD ICON

PENANG HOPES FERRIES WILL BE GIFT TO STATE

State mulls taking over ownership if federal govt has no plans for vessels

AUDREY DERMAWAN
GEORGE TOWN
news@nst.com.my

THE Penang government will consider taking over the iconic ferry service if the federal government has no plans to continue with it.

This was decided during Wednesday's state executive council meeting.

State Infrastructure and Transportation Committee chairman Zairil Khir Johari said the state government fully understood Penangites' sentiments, who disagreed with stopping the iconic ferry service.

"As such, as part of efforts to preserve the iconic ferry service, the state exco, which met on Wednesday, has decided that if the federal government is not interested to proceed with the iconic ferry service, then the state

government will consider taking over the ownership of the said ferries.

"Since the Penang Port Commission (PPC) and the Penang Port Sdn Bhd (PPSB) have no plans to retain the iconic ferry service as a transportation mode, then the state government suggests that these ferries be 'gifted' to the state and her people," he said yesterday.

Zairil said he would liaise with PPC, as the port authority, to discuss the state government's suggestion. It was reported that after nearly a century, the car-carrying ferries had ceased operating on Dec 31.

From Jan 1, PPSB, which took over the ferry services, only operated fast passenger ferries between the Pangkalan Sultan Abdul Halim ferry terminal in Butterworth and the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal (SPCT) here, while one of the existing iconic car-carrying ferries would be used to transport bicycles and motorcycles.

The interim plan is expected to

continue until PPSB introduced the use of passenger-only water buses and vehicle transporters by July 2022.

Initially, the state government had said it wanted to take over the ferry service in the past, only to change its stance later. It was reported that the state government had expressed willingness to take over the ferry service back in 2016.

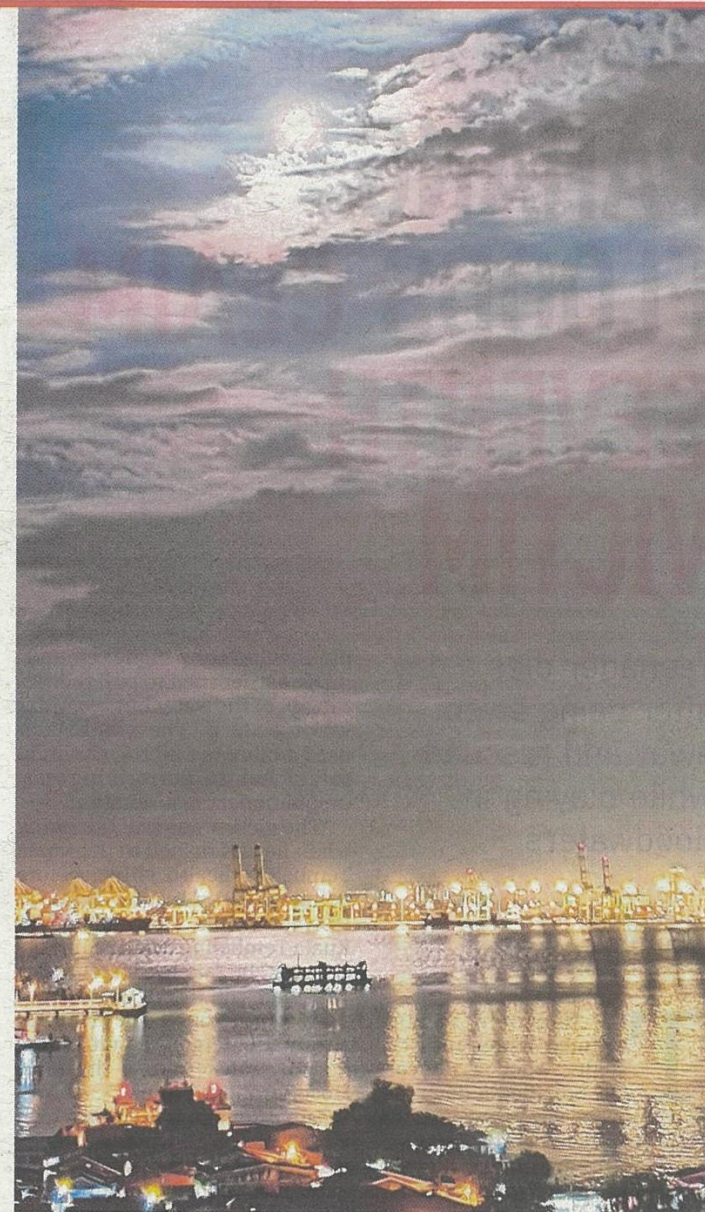
However, in 2017, former chief minister Lim Guan Eng said that the takeover plan had been put on hold until further discussions with then transport minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai.

However, in March 2019, Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said the state government would not take over the ferry service. He said this was because a study conducted by the state government found that the ferry services would make a loss of between RM10 million and RM15 million a year.

Again in October last year, Chow reiterated that the state government had no plans to take over the ferry service.



Zairil Khir Johari



The Penang ferry running its final rounds under the moonlight on Dec 29. PIC COURTESY OF NST READER