

New future for old ferries

Vessels to be turned into floating restaurants and tourist rides

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GEORGE TOWN: Many companies have submitted proposals to turn Penang's old ferries into floating restaurants and special tourist rides.

Despite delays amid the movement control order, Penang Port Commission (PPC) chairman Datuk Tan Teik Cheng said that several suitable candidates have been identified.

"Two ferries have been successfully picked up by eligible bidders. The other three ferries found suitable applicants.

"All the iconic Penang ferries are expected to be handed over to the successful bidders by next month.

There are six old Penang ferries. One was gifted to the state government, two will be turned into special tourist ferries, two will be transformed into floating restaurants and one will be made into a floating museum.

"A contract of 10 plus five years or 15 years for each ferry will be signed," Tan said in a statement yesterday.

On the damaged *Pulau Pinang* ferry, which had taken in water, Tan said the water was pumped out of the vessel when the river level receded at around 4pm yesterday.

The hole will be repaired so that the ferry will float again.

"Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong contacted me many times and showed his concern over this matter.

"I hope that all parties understand that the ferry has been inoperable since Nov 27, 2019," he said.

Tan explained that the ferry was old and the engine could not be fixed anymore.

"PPC decided to berth the ferry at Bagan Dalam river as the water is shallow, so the ferry cannot sink.

"When the ferry operation was changed to speedboat service on Jan 1, PPC listed this ferry as a floating museum," he said.

Meanwhile, commenting on the outburst last weekend after pictures of the *Pulau Pinang* ferry went public, former Jelutong MP Jeff Ooi pointed out that criticisms should be backed by fact-checking.



New life soon: The condition of the half-sunken 'Pulau Pinang' ferry at the Bagan Dalam dockyard next to Sungai Perai in Butterworth. — Pic from Tan Teik Cheng's Facebook

"Politicians shouldn't manipulate the ignorance of citizens who don't have the facts and official records on how the fleet of old ferries were slowly retired and decommissioned in November, 2019, when Pakatan Harapan helmed the Federal Government.

"We should stand up for facts," he said in a text yesterday.

Ooi, in his Facebook post, said "old politics has no place in the digital traceability of today".

"Let the better factual argument win the day," he posted.

Earlier, former Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng posted a comment that it was sad to see the state of the *Pulau Pinang* ferry after the service was stopped by the Perikatan Nasional government and Dr Wee.

Dr Wee has since corrected Lim's claim, pointing out that *Pulau Pinang* was towed to the Bagan Dalam dockyard along Sungai Perai on Nov 27, 2019, during Pakatan's stint in the Federal Government.

"Spare parts from the Netherlands were not available and the ferry has been inoperable until today," Dr Wee stated.

He noted that Lim was the Finance Minister then and Prasarana Berhad, the then ferry service operator, is a company of Minister of Finance Inc.

He said at the end of 2019, Lim had announced an allocation of RM30mil to Penang Port Sdn Bhd for the purpose of purchasing new catamaran ferries and taking over the service from RapidFerry, owned by Prasarana.