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INDONESIAN AND THAI RESEARCH ARCHAEOLOGISTS IMPRESSED WITH SUNGAI BATU ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

PENANG, 3 December 2015 – A senior researcher at the Indonesian National Research Centre for Archaeology, Professor Dr Harry Truman Simanjutak together with a lecturer from the Department of Archaeology, Slipakorn University in Thailand, Professor Dr Rasmi Shoocongdej were impressed with the discovery made by the Centre for Global Archaeological Research (PPAG) Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) concerning the historical site of Sungai Batu in Merbok, Kedah.

For Harry, the historic site of Sungai Batu has the potential to rival the popularity of Borobudur in his country.

“Sungai Batu is very unique not just from its historical background but also in the geography where it is located.

“If it is commercialised and given the right publicity, this site would ‘shine’. Malaysia is fortunate to possess a truly valuable historical heritage site which has convenient access and with the scenic view of Gunung (Mount) Jerai that can be seen from here,” he said.

According to Harry, in Indonesia there are also many similar Paleolithic sites, however community settlements and ironsmith workplaces such as those at the heritage site of Sungai Batu have yet to be found.

In the visit which lasted for more than an hour, both of them together with 70 researchers in archaeology from Thailand and Indonesia were taken for a tour around the archaeological site and were briefed by the Director of PPAG USM, Professor Dato’ Dr Mokhtar Saidin.

Meanwhile, added Rasmi, the historic remnants at Sungai Batu should be considered as of high importance, and as such the need for preservation in view of its great historic value for the region.

“I have been to this site in 2010 during the initial excavations, and after five years, when I return to this site, I could see many new discoveries although there is more that needs to be done, as the civilisation is expansive to the extent that the research done on it would be never ending,” he told the media during the site visit.

He further said that, most people in Thailand are still unaware of Sungai Batu even though the discovery has been considered as having great significance in relation to the civilisation of that period.

“The time will come when, this site would become a major attraction for tourists from all over the world if the right steps are taken in promoting it as a tourist attraction,” he added further.

At the same time, Mokhtar said, the cooperation established from the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) archaeology workshop held for the first time would present discoveries in the historical similarities among the three countries.

“The discovery of the Sungai Batu archaeology site has provided evidence of the relations which existed among the three countries, and which would spur more collaboration among the archaeologists to seek for more evidence in the history of man’s civilisation,” he explained.

After the visit to Sungai Batu, they also visited a Neolithic period community settlement site estimated to be close to 5,000 years old. The discovery of valuable relics such as shells, various human skeletal remains and ceramics proved that Guar Kepah used to be a community settlement during the Neolithic period.

Added Mokhtar, Guar Kepah will also be turned into another archaeological site and would be gazetted as a heritage site pending the approval of the state government.

Apart from that, Mokhtar is also doing a research on whether the Sungai Batu site has any connection to the discovery of the Neolithic community at Guar Kepah.

Earlier on, the three archaeologists presented a study on the history of the Neolithic period in their own countries at the Conference Room, School of Social Sciences USM.

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