

Panel on Home Affairs
Preservation of historical buildings

Q.(a) What is the Government's position in relation to the preservation of historical buildings?

A: The Government's objective on preservation of historical buildings is to preserve the best examples of our built heritage in the territory as far as possible so as to show to our younger and future generations our historical development and to foster a sense of belonging and identity among them.

The legislation directly related to the preservation of historical buildings is the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (A&M Ordinance) Cap. 53. It commenced operation in 1976 and provides for the declaration of historical buildings, among other things, as monuments. It also provides for a mechanism through which fair compensation for financial loss may be given. A total number of 77 monuments have been declared thus far.

Q.(b) What action is being taken by the Government to preserve Kom Tong Hall?

A: Since the demolition plan of Kom Tong Hall was made known to the Government in July 2002, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has immediately met with the owner to explore the possibility of preserving the building.

Q.(c) What is the progress of discussion between the Government and the present owner of Kom Tong Hall?

A: Discussion is still going on, and both parties have shown good faith in reaching agreement to preserve Kom Tong Hall. The owner has issued a press release on 20 November 2002 indicating their willingness to withhold their submission of demolition plan to the Building Department, and to suspend the hoarding works on the building.

Q.(d) Whether there is a mechanism to resolve conflicts between the policy to preserve historical buildings and the development plans of privately owned historical buildings?

A: There are at present established mechanisms to handle development plans affecting privately owned historical buildings.

If development plans requires the approval of Town Planning Board, the Board will consider the application having taken into account the views of AMO of LCSD. Similarly, in cases where lease modifications are involved, the Lands Department would consult AMO before deciding on the application.

Q.(e) Whether there are any plans to implement schemes for the protection of historical buildings and sites which are in private ownership?

A: The Home Affairs Bureau is now conducting a review of the policy and related legislation on the preservation of historical buildings and sites which are in private ownership. The question of affording better protection to historical buildings and sites in private ownership will be addressed in the context of this review.

Q.(f) Whether implementation of a Transfer of Development Rights scheme can prevent the demolition of Kom Tong Hall?

A: The Transfer of Development Rights scheme is a proposal being actively considered by the Government to help induce the consent of historical building owners towards the declaration of their properties. Since details have yet to be worked out, it is premature to say whether the implementation of such a scheme can prevent the demolition of Kom Tong Hall.