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## Getting four more Unesco heritage sites recognised

GEORGE TOWN: The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture is getting the consent of the various State governments to pave the way for Unesco recognition of four more places as world heritage sites.

Deputy Minister Muhammad Bakhtiar Wan Chik said the four sites are the National Park; Royal Belum in Gerik, Perak; Permatang Kuarza in Gombak, Selangor; and the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM).

He said the four sites are on the Unesco tentative list pending the consent from the state governments.

"We face some challenges in getting the consent from the Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu governments for the National Park site but as for the other three sites, there should be no problem.

"I hope these three states can give their consent to us soon so that we can elaborate it to Unesco," he told reporters after opening the fourth National Archaeology Seminar here today.

He said it was aimed at declaring these sites, which had historical and heritage value, as Unesco World Heritage Sites in the effort to protect their biodiversity and uniqueness.

He also said that the ministry, through the National Heritage Department, worked with agencies and universities in conducting research to identify sites that could be made into national heritage sites before being put forward to Unesco and declared as Unesco World Heritage Sites.

Currently, four sites in Malaysia have

been recognised by Unesco as World Heritage Sites, namely George Town/Melaka, Lenggong Valley, Kinabalu Park and Gunung Mulu Sarawak.

Muhammad Bakhtiar, who is the MP for Balik Pulau, said the ministry is working on securing recognition for a few more national heritage sites, including the Kapitan Keling Mosque and Penang Free School in Penang. He said Malaysia has 965 archaeological sites, 822 of them on land and 143 underwater.

"A total of 13 sites have been gazetted as National Heritage Sites and eight as heritage sites under the National Heritage Department," he said.

Meanwhile, on the development of Gua Kepah in Kepala Batas, where a prehistoric human skeleton thought to be at least 5,000 years old was found, Bakhtiar said the site is actually part of the Bujang Valley in Kedah and the ministry is working with the state governments to set up an archaeological complex in Sungai Batu.

"Gua Kepah is actually part of Lembah Bujang, spreading from Kedah to Cerok Tokun in Penang, covering 224 kilometres, and the archaeological complex will display and tell a story of the findings in Gua Kepah after it has been gazetted as a National Heritage Site," he said.

Bujang Valley in the Merbok district of Kedah has the richest archaeological site in Malaysia, with more than 50 ancient candi (temples). - Bernama