



Press Release

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“Living Restoration” on Merchant Street urban renewal project opens to public

YANGON: After ten months of extensive restoration, a heritage building on the Merchant Street in Yangon’s Downtown is going to be exhibited to the public from April 30.

The two-storied colonial building which is home to around 80 people and a mix of commercial and residential uses in Kyauktada Township will be accessible by public until July 31.

Renovation was started at the over 100-year-old heritage building in July last year by Yangon Heritage Trust and an international NGO Turquoise Mountain in partnership with the Prince of Wales’ Foundation, and funded by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, and Alphawood Foundation through Global Heritage Fund.

The project aims to raise awareness and appreciation of the value of Yangon’s heritage among local people, authorities and the government, and to link with and help inform wider urban planning initiatives. It seeks to retain the community in and around the building and to enable a mutually sustainable future.

The building embodies so many of the qualities and challenges of properties in the downtown. It is a prominently placed elegant colonial building with grand internal spaces and vibrant street life surrounding it, but was in a very poor state, littered with unsympathetic additions and in need of urgent repair.

The founder and Chairman of the Yangon Heritage Trust, Dr Thant Myint-U, said that he was delighted with the completion of the project and saw it as an important first step towards the proper restoration of downtown Yangon.

"We need to move forward on several fronts at the same time. We need a moratorium on any further destruction of old buildings, new policies and regulations, schemes that will integrate economic development and conservation, public outreach and consultation, and, critically, demonstrations like this one to show people what's possible."

"We are extremely grateful to Turquoise Mountain for undertaking this effort and hope it will be the first of many partnerships between TM and YHT," he said.

The vice chairman and director of Yangon Heritage Trust, Daw Moe Moe Lwin, said that this project is YHT's first renovation project of privately owned building in Yangon and is to demonstrate the need to conserve heritage, how conservation would benefit the community, how to conserve technically, and how to engage community.

“The site was chosen because of its location easily seen by public, being a former residence of well-known writer-journalist Saya Ludu U Sein Win, a display of original features of Merchant Street and its architectural significance,” she said.

Harry Wardill, Director of Myanmar Turquoise Mountain said that building a local workforce trained in heritage restoration technical skills and trade is an important legacy of this project.

“Over 250 local tradespeople have been trained through a programme of works and training workshops in traditional building skills led by local and international experts, ensuring the restoration works could be achieved to the required international standards. Tradespeople were enabled to deal with historic buildings in the future, creating the foundation for a viable restoration industry. Craftspeople were educated on the use of appropriate materials and contemporary techniques of restoration,” he said.

Training workshops conducted over the year have focused on the skills of decorative lime plasterwork, brickwork conservation, conservative repair and restoration of architectural carpentry, traditional clay tile roofing, measured surveying and archival heritage photography.

The building also received blue plaque commemoration by the Yangon Heritage Trust as the city's first building conserved according to international best practice.

Following the opening of the exhibition on 30 April, the exhibition will be open for public viewing from 3pm to 7pm each day, excluding Mondays. A series of public talks, screenings and demonstrations will be held weekly in the exhibition space during the exhibition period, until the end of July.

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Yangon Heritage Trust is an independent centre of excellence working to promote and integrate Yangon's unique urban heritage into a 21st century vision of Yangon as one of Asia's most liveable cities. YHT advocates for heritage protection, develops clear and sustainable policy options, engages with government, business and civil society, communicates its ideas to the widest possible audience, undertakes specific conservation projects, and facilitates research and training. www.yangonheritagetrust.org.



Turquoise Mountain is a non-profit, non-governmental organization specializing in urban regeneration, and traditional arts and architecture. Turquoise Mountain was established at the request of HRH The Prince of Wales and the then President of Afghanistan, and has been successfully completing projects in Afghanistan since 2006. It was set up in Myanmar at the end of 2014 and is working with the Yangon Heritage Trust to carry out practical heritage led regeneration projects in Yangon's historic Downtown as well as delivering a programme of vocational training to complement this. It is also working to promote and develop Myanmar's traditional craft industry. www.turquoisemountain.org, www.turquoisemountainarts.org



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