



All systems go

(Above) Two fast boats for commuters docked beside an old iconic ferry at Sultan Abdul Halim Terminal on the Penang mainland. Today, the fast boats will be taking over from the old fleet for an interim period. (Inset) The fast boats parked at Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal in George Town. — CHAN BOON KAI and LIM BENG TATT/The Star

A man watching a ferry depart from the Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal on its last day of service in George Town yesterday. PIX BY DANIAL SAAD



MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE

FINAL PENANG FERRY RIDE FOR THOUSANDS

Passengers not deterred by long queues to get on board car-carrying ferries one last time

However, when he reached the ferry terminal, the queue was so long that he decided to turn back to take the first Penang bridge into the island, and board the ferry from the Pangkalan Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal here instead.

"After this, I will take the bridge again back to the island to begin my holidays.

"I wouldn't miss this final ride for anything. I brought my daughter on this iconic ferry, otherwise her generation will never get to experience it," he added.

A visibly excited Eryna said "syiok" (enjoyable) and "gembira" (happy) when asked if she enjoyed the ferry ride.

As for Grab driver Menjit Singh, 59, he said he would miss the car-carrying ferries.

He recalled his first ferry ride back in 1983, when the bridge was not built yet.

"I have been a supporter of the ferry service for the past two decades or so.

"Living in Butterworth, I find it very convenient to travel between the two straits using the ferry, especially when I am in this part of town (George Town). I don't have to drive all the way to get to the bridge," he said.

Menjit hoped the government would bring back the ferries in the future.

Frenchman Nathan Simon, 24, said he was glad to be part of the memorable ferry ride.

He had no idea that the car-carrying ferries would cease operations for both four-wheel vehicles and foot passengers until he was told about it.

"This is my third time riding on the ferry and I enjoyed all three experiences very much.

"Back home, we also have similar services from one city to another, which takes a couple of hours.

"Well, it is good that the ferry service is moving with the times to be more innovative with the

introduction of fast boats," said Simon, who has been working in Kuala Lumpur for the past year.

After nearly a century of service, Penang's car-carrying ferries finally ceased operations.

From today, Penang Port Sdn Bhd (PPSB), which will take over the ferry service from Prasarana Malaysia Bhd, will operate only fast passenger boats between the mainland and the island, while Pulau Ansa will be used to transport only motorcycles and bicycles.

This is in the interim before PPSB introduces passenger-only water buses and vehicle transporters by July 2022.

During the interim period, the ferry terminals will also undergo upgrading.

Earlier, former finance minister Lim Guan Eng, who went on his final ferry ride, said the people of Penang would not forget and forgive those responsible for retiring the car-carrying ferries.

"This has been a part of a Penangite's life all this while. This is a part of our heritage culture and a symbol of Penang, enjoyed by all.

"Today is a sad day for all of us. So let us not forget today (yesterday) and let us not forgive those responsible for stopping the ferry service," he said, adding that if Pakatan Harapan was still in power, the iconic ferry service would still be in operation.

"Which is why, when I was the minister, I had approved a RM30 million allocation on condition that the iconic ferries continued to operate," he added.

Lim also said that if ever there was a change in the federal government, the iconic ferry service would be brought back.

Asked if DAP or the state government had plans to restore the ferry service in the interim period, Lim said the matter was under the federal government.

Traders at Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal in a quandary

GEORGE TOWN: Traders operating at the Pangkalan Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal here are worried about their future with Penang's iconic car-carrying ferries ceasing operations.

The remaining 16 traders on-site are at their wits' end on whether to remain open for business.

Tidbit seller Mohamed Salihu Abdul Rahuman (Salim), 60, representing the traders at the ferry terminal, said if they continued to operate, they feared there would be no business.

"However, if we close our business, how are we to make ends meet? Bigger shops like us have to pay RM800 in monthly rental to Penang Port and the smaller ones about RM300 every month.

"We wrote to Penang Port on Dec 23, asking to be exempted from paying rent in the next 18 months during the interim period when this ferry terminal will be upgraded to prepare for the modern fleet of vessels in July 2022. However, there has been no response from them.

"We are at a loss. We don't know what else to do," he said at his stall here yesterday.

Salihu said business had dropped drastically due to the fall in the number of ferry passengers in recent years, which was compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"In the past, we were able to earn about RM2,000 to RM3,000 on good days. Now we earn nothing near that," he said, adding that he inherited the business from his father, who took over from his grandfather.

Many of the traders here have been plying their trade for between two and three generations.

Salihu said he had sought Pengkalan Kota assemblyman Daniel Gooi's assistance.

Gooi said PPSB had written to the traders, offering them two options — to trade at the existing location or to move to the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal where the fast passenger ferries would operate from today.

"The traders will need to meet with Penang Port Sdn Bhd (PPSB) to iron out details of the options given.

"We see this response from the PPSB as a positive outcome. This is just the beginning and I will try to assist the traders in the best way possible," he added.



Passengers disembarking from the ferry at the Pangkalan Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal in George Town yesterday.

	SUBUH (am)	SYURUK	ZUHUR	ASAR (pm)	MAGHRIB	ISYAK
Melaka	6:02	7:16	1:17	4:40	7:16	8:30
Penang	6:15	7:26	1:24	4:47	7:18	8:33
K. Lumpur	6:07	7:18	1:20	4:42	7:17	8:31
Johor Baru	5:54	7:08	1:11	4:35	7:11	8:25
Kuantan	6:00	7:13	1:14	4:37	7:11	8:22
Ipoh	6:11	7:22	1:22	4:45	7:17	8:32

AUDREY DERMAWAN
GEORGE TOWN
audreynd@nst.com.my

THOUSANDS of motorists and foot passengers grabbed the opportunity to go for a last ride on the iconic car-carrying ferries yesterday, which ceased operations after midnight.

Among them were insurance agent Soon Yong Khoo, 40, who took the day off to bring his wife, son and mother on the ferry.

He said he did not mind waiting more than 30 minutes to get on board.

"I told myself that I had to grab the opportunity to go on the ferry ride no matter what.

"This will be a memorable ride for us and many others," he said on board the car-carrying Pulau Ansa ferry yesterday.

Soon said the last time he took a ride on the ferry was two years ago.

He expressed hope that the federal government would bring back the car-carrying ferries in the future.

Sharing his sentiment was teacher Mohammad Kamarul Arif, 33, who took opportunity of the school holidays to visit Penang from Perak with his wife Norazita Jasdi, 32, and daughter Eryna Safiya, 8.

Kamarul said he had wanted to board the ferry from the Pangkalan Sultan Abdul Halim ferry terminal in Butterworth to get to the island when he arrived from Perak.