

MEDIA RELEASE

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**THE PADANG CIVIC ENSEMBLE ADDED TO SINGAPORE'S TENTATIVE LIST FOR
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES**

Singapore, 9 March 2023 – The Padang Civic Ensemble – the Padang and its surrounding civic architecture – has been added to Singapore's Tentative List¹ for UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The National Heritage Board (NHB) will be studying the site further with the benefit of advice and guidance from the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies² through the Preliminary Assessment (PA), a new mechanism in the World Heritage Site nomination process which will begin this year. The Tentative List submission is the first step in the potential nomination of The Padang Civic Ensemble as an UNESCO World Heritage Site in the future.

2. Following the successful inscription of the Singapore Botanic Gardens as Singapore's first UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015, NHB has been looking into the next possible candidate for Singapore's second nomination. The Padang Civic Ensemble was identified as the best possible option as it stands a good chance of meeting the World Heritage criteria. The successful nomination of The Padang Civic Ensemble will provide greater recognition of Singapore's heritage on the global stage, in particular of the Padang and the surrounding monuments, raise awareness of heritage preservation in Singapore, foster a stronger sense of national identity and pride for Singaporeans, and ensure the site's preservation for future generations.

3. To be inscribed as a World Heritage Site, sites must be of Outstanding Universal Value and meet at least one out of 10 selection criteria (please refer to **Annex A** for the full criteria). Out of the six criteria for cultural properties, NHB considers that The Padang Civic Ensemble

¹ To nominate a World Heritage Site, a State Party must first submit a Tentative List to UNESCO, which recognises sites in a State Party's territory that would be further researched on for nomination as a World Heritage Site.

² A nominated property is independently evaluated by two Advisory Bodies mandated by the World Heritage Convention: the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which respectively provide the World Heritage Committee with evaluations of cultural and of natural sites nominated. The third Advisory Body is the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), an intergovernmental organisation which provides the Committee with expert advice on conservation of cultural sites, as well as on training activities.

is most likely to meet and fulfil criterion (iv) – “To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history”. This is because The Padang Civic Ensemble is an outstanding example of a British colonial civic square in the tropics. The coalescence of colonial-era and post-independence civic institutions within a single municipal area bears testament to the historically widespread phenomenon of decolonisation and the globally significant transition of long-held British territories to newly independent nations in the decades following World War II.

4. Besides its high potential to meet the World Heritage criteria, The Padang Civic Ensemble bears national and historical significance. The Padang has a high level of preservation, having been gazetted as a National Monument on 9 August 2022. In addition, the adjacent buildings such as the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, the Former Supreme Court and City Hall (now the National Gallery Singapore), the Former Parliament House and Annex Building (now the Arts House) and various other National Monuments are similarly of high historical significance.

5. Participation in the PA is one way that NHB will be able to better understand the feasibility of the potential nomination. The PA is a newly introduced upstream mechanism in the World Heritage Site nomination process, which provides State Parties with an opportunity to receive guidance from the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies on a specific site early on, prior to the submission of a full-scale nomination. It will also provide a longer runway for NHB to work with the relevant government agencies and stakeholders to address redevelopment concerns, informed by guidance from the Advisory Bodies, before submitting an official nomination. The submission of Singapore’s Tentative List is a necessary step for participation in the inaugural PA in September 2023.

6. In addition to the PA, NHB will be carrying out further research in 2023 to determine potential implications on the site and surrounding developments. The research findings will also allow NHB to assess the benefits and implications of the proposed nomination, and the exact timeline needed for a full-scale nomination to the World Heritage list. The outcome of NHB’s research, as well as the results of the PA, will help guide the decision to be made at a later stage on whether Singapore will formally pursue the nomination. This is an important step as Singapore will have to carefully study and balance long-term urban redevelopment needs with the protection requirements of a World Heritage Site.

7. As part of its preparatory efforts, NHB has held focus group discussions in January and February 2023, comprising various groups of stakeholders such as local heritage experts and professionals, academics, government agencies, monument and building owners. The sessions were attended by close to 60 participants, and while there were some concerns raised regarding the impact on redevelopment in the area, they were generally supportive of the submission of The Padang Civic Ensemble to be added to Singapore's Tentative List. There are also plans for further public engagement at a later stage.

8. Ms Jean Wee, Director, Preservation of Sites & Monuments division, NHB, said: "Set in the heart of the Civic District, The Padang Civic Ensemble bears national and historical significance. In particular, the Padang has been a mainstay in Singapore's urban fabric from the colonial era till present. NHB's research has also found that it has a good chance of demonstrating global significance and meeting the criteria for World Heritage. While a future nomination could be a possibility, these are early days yet. NHB will conduct more research and seek guidance from the World Heritage Centre through the Preliminary Assessment, before the decision to formally pursue the nomination is made."

9. Dr Chang Jiat Hwee, Associate Professor at Asia Research Institute and the Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore, who attended one of the focus group discussions, said: "The Padang and its surrounding civic architecture capture the many layers of Singapore's history from the colonial to post-colonial era and continue to co-exist alongside our modern built heritage. Its inclusion on the Tentative List as a potential nomination would raise awareness of the importance of sensitively protecting buildings from the different historical periods in Singapore."

10. Mr Deepak Gurnani, Chairman, High Street Centre Management Corporation, who likewise attended one of the focus group discussions, added: "I have worked in the area near the Padang for 34 years, and it is one of the most walkable spots in Singapore, with many landmarks and activities concentrated in a single area. While there may be opportunity costs brought on by development restrictions, the value of a World Heritage Site inscription would be worthwhile in the long term. I am fully supportive of this potential nomination and the global recognition it could bring for the Padang and its surrounding monuments."

11. Singapore's Tentative List will be published on the World Heritage Centre's [website](#) on 10 March 2023. (Please refer to **Annex B** for Singapore's Tentative List.)



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For media enquiries, please contact:

Charissa Yang

Tate Anzur

9112 7355

charissa.yang@tateanzur.com

Cherell Soon

Tate Anzur

8102 9131

cherell.soon@tateanzur.com

About the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993, and turns 30 this year. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.

Criteria for the Assessment of Outstanding Universal Value

Sites may be nominated for World Heritage listing under cultural, natural or mixed criteria. Nominated sites must demonstrate that they satisfy one or more of the 10 criteria ; six for cultural properties and four for natural properties. The six criteria for the evaluation of the cultural properties are as follows:

- (i) To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (ii) To exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- (iii) To bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living, or which has disappeared;
- (iv) To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stages(s) in human history;**
- (v) To be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures) or human interaction with the environment, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; and/or
- (vi) To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs with artistic and literary works or outstanding universal significance.

**TENTATIVE LIST
SUBMISSION FORMAT**

Name of Property: The Padang Civic Ensemble

State, Province or Region: Singapore, Central Singapore

Latitude and Longitude, or UTM coordinates: 1.2905024 N, 103.8529429 E

DESCRIPTION:

The Padang (Malay for ‘field’) is a multi-use open green space set at the heart of the historic Singapore settlement that combines the features and functions of a playing field, ceremonial parade ground, and tropical civic square. As one of the oldest open spaces in Singapore, the Padang is a seemingly nondescript yet dynamic green that has evolved organically and accrued diverse functions since its formation in the early 1820s. Shortly after the establishment of a British trading post in Singapore in 1819, the Padang originated as a military parade ground within the larger cantonment which served as the settlement’s military and governing centre. It also served as a defensive esplanade and provided a clear field of fire to defend the fledgling British settlement against foreign naval invasions and internal uprisings. Once the military threat subsided, the site soon gained new and overlapping functions –developing over time into a playing field for British sports like cricket, the town’s municipal and civic centre, and a commemorative venue for pageantries, royal celebrations and Singapore’s independence day parade. Continuously activated over two centuries, the Padang has been a mainstay in Singapore’s urban and social fabric since the colonial era till present.

The Padang is the focal point of a British colonial civic square which was developed by the former colonial administration as its municipal headquarters, and subsequently appropriated by the post-independence government. Sharing the evolutionary trajectory of similar open spaces and civic squares found in former British settlements, the property bears testament to the widespread phenomenon of decolonisation and the globally significant transition of long-held British territories to newly independent nations in the decades following World War II.

With the Padang as its centrepiece, the property comprises the Former City Hall and Former Supreme Court buildings (currently the National Gallery Singapore), Saint Andrew’s Cathedral, Old Parliament House (currently the Arts House), Former Town Hall and Victoria Memorial Hall (currently Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall respectively), and the Former Empress Place building (currently the Asian Civilisations Museum) which all date to the period of British colonial rule in Singapore (1819–1963). This cluster of Neoclassical buildings juxtapose against the adjacent New Parliament and New Supreme Court buildings which were constructed during the post-independence era (1965–present). Two sporting clubs, the Singapore Recreation Club and the Singapore Cricket Club occupy the Padang’s north and



south ends respectively, and contribute to the site's long-running recreational character. The Padang Civic Ensemble collectively represents the administrative, legislative, social, recreational, religious and cultural functions that served colonial and post-colonial society in Singapore.

The property includes all the structures and components necessary to tangibly convey its potential Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as an outstanding example of a British colonial civic square in the tropics. The property is also protected by a compact buffer zone which has been preliminarily delineated based on the attributes that support the potential OUV and enhance the site's ceremonial and municipal setting. Broadening definitions of built heritage beyond the spectacular and monumental, global recognition of the property will raise awareness of the urgency to preserve similar open spaces which, due to their modest appearances, are easily overlooked and more vulnerable to erasure.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value:

(Preliminary identification of the values of the property which merit inscription on the World Heritage List)

With a coalescence of colonial-era municipal buildings alongside their functioning contemporary counterparts, the property is an outstanding example of a British colonial civic square in the tropics which succinctly demonstrates the global phenomenon of former British territories transitioning from colonial rule to emergent nationhood in the decades after World War II. Alongside cantonments, esplanades, urban parks, parade and sporting grounds, these civic squares are part of the larger genre of British colonial grounds and open spaces which were invariably implemented throughout the British empire to meet various military, sporting, civic and commemorative needs. The property is proposed as a British colonial civic square in the tropics due to its evident tropical character which departs significantly in form from the civic squares of Britain's white settler colonies.

The property is considered exceptional for integrating both British colonial-era and post-independence civic institutions within a single municipal area, which together tangibly illustrate the global transition from colonial rule to emergent nationhood. As the former governing centre of the Straits Settlements, the Neoclassical buildings surrounding the Padang were designed to convey the political authority and technological achievements of the British administration housed within. The visual dominance and imposing quality of the architectural ensemble would have been further reinforced when contrasted against the modest build of the adjacent ethnic enclaves. While Neoclassical architecture already signified authority and dignity in their native western cities, when transplanted to the colonies where such forms were completely alien, it intensified the structure's sense of authority, and by extension, the power of the British empire it represented. Arranged along the fringes of the Padang, these buildings project a stateliness and monumentality which are further enhanced by contrast against the openness of the flat green. Previously home to key civic institutions like the Legislative Council and the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, these grand buildings are a testament to Singapore's leading administrative role as the former capital and judiciary seat of the Straits Settlements, as well as the enduring legacy of British systems of governance in the 21st century. Around the turn of the millennium, both the Supreme Court and Parliament relocated to adjacent buildings to better meet the growing needs of the city-state. These new offices were designed as sensitive and modern interpretations of the surrounding colonial architecture: crowned with a circular disc instead of a copper dome, the Supreme Court mirrors the scale, design, and organisational structure of its predecessor. This assemblage of colonial-era and post-independence architectural landmarks have developed around the Padang, embodying the origin and evolution of a former colony's civic core.

While this clustering of Neoclassical government buildings around an open space may bear resemblance to the civic squares in Britain's white settler colonies, the property – with its central green sward lined by an avenue of colossal heritage Rain Trees – presents an unmistakable tropicality that is visually distinct from the typically paved, hardscape civic squares found in North America and the Antipodes. Besides the verdant landscape, buildings in the property also incorporate a wide range of tropical architectural features and climatic adaptations such as porches, verandahs, louvers and high ceilings.

The focal point of the property, the Padang, boasts a high level of preservation and has resisted redevelopment since its formation nearly two hundred years ago around 1822–23. Since the early years of the British settlement, the field has maintained its nondescript quality free of inappropriate contemporary structures and has remained an enduring landmark in the city's ever-changing landscape. Despite only officially attaining National Monument status in 2022, the Padang has survived multiple change-of-governments from the colonial to the post-colonial era, not to mention the damages sustained during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942–45). As seemingly unoccupied open spaces often situated in historic cores, colonial civic squares are susceptible to encroachment and erasure due to urban redevelopment pressures. While a number of these sites have been either reduced or completely destroyed, the Padang in Singapore has conversely been widened through land reclamation works. The property's high level of preservation can be further appreciated in view of Singapore's land scarcity, high population density and rapid urbanisation since the early 1960s which have transformed the cityscape.

In addition, the property can be more precisely classified as a *padang*: a tropical, Malayan variant of British colonial civic square found in settlements throughout former British Malaya. Invariably situated at the heart of the old colonial settlement, *padang* and their surrounding structures formed a spatial framework that gave shape to the settlement's administrative district. Although the term *padang* specifically refers to the field, these close-cropped rectangular greens are typically accompanied by a necklace of colonial-era civic buildings, specifically government offices, the parliament or courthouse, the town or city hall, a sports club typically named after the state, and an Anglican church. In fact, the majority of settlements in British Malaya at all levels of the urban and administrative hierarchy contained a *padang* surrounded by these same structures, with the exact positions of the buildings varying slightly across settlements. The unmistakable consistency with which the British applied this spatial framework all over British Malaya in former colonies such as Penang, Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, and Taiping to name a few, points to both its practicality and vital role in the effective management of the settlement. The property therefore exemplifies the *padang* spatial framework and is the best of its kind: in addition to containing all the colonial-era buildings and institutions which are integral to the spatial framework, compared to other *padang*, the arrangement of the buildings in the property is more orderly and neatly encloses the field. Unlike the British settlements in Melaka or the Federated Malay States which were either adapted from or built around existing settlements, early British planners in Singapore generally had a much freer hand and faced fewer constraints in laying out the settlement as there were few inhabitants or built structures on the island. That said, although *padang* and the wider suite of British colonial civic squares were British in origin, these spaces were often appropriated by their respective post-colonial states and have become important sites of civic pride and emergent nationhood. The property is deeply associated with watersheds in Singapore's journey to independence and continues to host milestone independence day parades.

Criteria met:

(Please tick the box corresponding to the proposed criteria and justify the use of each below)

(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv) ✓	(v)	(vi)	(vii)	(viii)	(ix)	(x)
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The property is an outstanding example of a British colonial civic square in the tropics which was routinely implemented by the British throughout their tropical colonies in Asia, Africa and the West Indies to meet various military, sporting and ceremonial needs. Compared to other similar sites, the property is the best preserved in terms of both form and continuity of function, which is especially notable given the high susceptibility of such open spaces to erasure due to urban intensification in city centres worldwide.

As a tangible legacy of British systems of governance, civic institutions, sporting culture and religion, the cluster of colonial-era buildings around the green are a testament to the globally significant period of British imperial expansion and colonial rule that has indelibly shaped the development of major cities all over the world. The Padang is the centrepiece of this British colonial civic square which, through a coalescence of colonial-era and contemporary government buildings, concisely encapsulates the global transition of former British colonies to newly independent nations following the decline of the British Empire in the decades after World War II.

Statements of authenticity and/or integrity:

Statement of Authenticity

The key attributes that convey the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the property satisfy the conditions of authenticity. Despite being an open space embedded within the urban core of land-scarce Singapore, the property's form, function and setting have been generally well-preserved. While other British colonial civic squares may have been reduced, redeveloped or erased, the Padang is highly intact and was even expanded over time. Preservation guidelines ensure careful maintenance and management of the field, such as reinstatement works after every major event. As National Monuments, the Padang and its surrounding colonial-era buildings are accorded the highest level of protection under the Preservation of Monuments Act.

Since its formation by the British nearly two centuries ago till present, the multi-purpose Padang has been continuously activated as a parade ground, sporting ground, civic space and commemorative venue. This strong continuity of functions is supported by the surrounding buildings and institutions, which also contribute to the property's civic and municipal setting. Although colonial-era buildings like the Former Supreme Court and Former City Hall have been repurposed into arts and cultural institutions, key design features such as neoclassical architectural elements and climatic adaptations remain legible due to sensitive restoration works. Moreover, the property's wider civic and municipal setting is well-preserved as key government offices such as the Parliament, Supreme Court, Ministry of Trade and Industry, and Ministry of Finance continue to operate from within the property and buffer zone boundaries.

Statement of Integrity

The extent of the property is sufficient to encapsulate all the key elements of a British colonial civic square in the tropics which bears witness to the globally significant period of British imperial expansion and colonial rule, and the subsequent transition to independent nationhood.

Despite occupying prime land in the city centre, the property has long resisted redevelopment pressures, at variance with Singapore's predominantly high-rise, high density urban landscape. This was achieved by transferring land pressure on the historic core to the surrounding reclaimed land, which has preserved the property's visual and spatial integrity. Additionally, the majority of the buildings within the property are National Monuments which are accorded the highest level of legislative protection under the Preservation of Monuments Act (established 1971). As such, the physical fabric of the property is in good condition, with deterioration processes kept in check through government monitoring, policies, grants and joint efforts between the National Heritage Board and the monument owners.

Although extensive land reclamation and urban developments along the shore have obscured the property's relationship with the sea, and by extension its genesis as a military esplanade, these were part of the site's evolution and bear minimal impact on the understanding of its value as a British colonial civic square. Conversely, these alterations to the shoreline have also contributed positively to the property's value: for example, the Padang's longstanding recreational function has been reinforced by the construction of an adjacent park on reclaimed land with free, round-the-clock public access.

Comparison with other similar properties:

(The comparison should outline similarities with other properties on the World Heritage List or not, and the reasons that make the property stand out)

Civic squares, urban parks, open fields, parades and sporting grounds which bear similarities to the property can be found within historic centres throughout Britain's former imperial possessions in India, Africa and the West Indies, sometimes taking on local terms and variations like the Malayan *padang* or Indian *maidan*. A range of suitable comparisons has been identified from this broad genre of British colonial grounds based on formal or functional similarities with the property. These include sites which can be classified as British colonial civic squares in the tropics, and other colonial grounds set in former British settlements with similar overlapping civic and recreational functions. Among these identified comparisons, a total of five sites from Malaysia, India and Barbados have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, albeit as part of larger World Heritage Sites, and attest to the widespread application of such multi-purpose grounds across Britain's imperial network. The property is unique in how it gives prominence to an open space, which remains a vulnerable and under-represented nomination category on the World Heritage List. The Esplanade in the *Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca: Melaka and George Town* and the Oval Maidan in *The Victorian and Art Deco Ensemble of Mumbai* warrant further comparative analysis due to their high level of intactness and close formal resemblance to the property.

The Esplanade in George Town is a sea-fronting square field that is bordered by the Penang Straits on the north, Fort Cornwallis on the east, Town Hall and City Hall on the west, and lastly, Hong Leong Bank, the former Chinese Chamber of Commerce building and the State Legislative Assembly Building on the south. Although looser and more sprawling than the property in Singapore, the arrangement of the civic buildings and government offices around the Esplanade generally conforms to the *padang* spatial configuration observed throughout British Malaya. As the two earliest British outposts established in Southeast Asia, George Town and Singapore share a similar urban morphology and developed from the area around their respective esplanades (these areas were recognised as the best location and prime land in the early settlements). Both the Esplanade and the Padang have also held similar functions as a defensive esplanade, parade ground, recreation ground, commemorative space, as well as cultural and performance venue. Like the Padang, the Esplanade continues to function as a ceremonial venue for national independence parades. The surrounding areas of the Esplanade are also dotted with similar monuments such as a Cenotaph, a fountain and a memorial clock tower built to commemorate Queen's Victoria's Golden Jubilee which add to the area's stately nature and historicity. Due to the relocation and subsequent bombing of the Penang Cricket Club and Penang Recreation Club which once stood on the field, the Esplanade in George Town largely lost its function as a sporting ground in the mid-20th century and the field was described in the property's nomination dossier as being under-utilised at the time of nomination in 2008. With the installation of a Speaker's Square on the field in 2010, the site has gained additional civic functions and increased activation.

Inscribed as part of *The Victorian and Art Deco Ensemble of Mumbai* as a World Heritage Site in 2018, the **Oval Maidan** serves as the unifying element and visual centrepiece between the Victorian Gothic buildings along its eastern boundary and the Art Deco buildings along its western boundary. As an urban open space surrounded by grand public buildings such as the Bombay High Court, the Rajabai Clock Tower and the Old Secretariat Building, the spatial layout of the Maidan in Mumbai constitutes an architectural and institutional ensemble similar



to that of the property. Much like Padang in Singapore, the Oval Maidan was originally constructed for defence purposes – as a free field of fire and a distancing device to segregate the colonists and the indigenous population. When the fort walls were removed in the 1860s, a section of this military esplanade was converted into the Oval Maidan, which was used as a horse-riding and recreational ground during the 19th century. Although it was once a venue for the Independence Day celebrations, compared to the Padang, the civic and municipal dimension of the Oval Maidan is far less pronounced and largely overshadowed by its primary designation as a Grade I recreational ground. The Oval Maidan shares the same recreational and sporting functions as the Padang and continues to be a popular venue for cricket tournaments and football matches to this day.