

# Bidding adieu to

PUTRI ZANINA is overcome with  
the final train ride



Old hydraulic buffer stop dating back to 1930 — the only one of its kind in all of Malaysia and Singapore



Giant mural paintings above the ticket counter depicting agricultural activities in old Malaya

**T**HE train pulls to a stop at about six in the evening. Its whistle shrieks just as the wheels grind to a halt.

Passengers onboard grab their luggage from the overhead compartments and, almost impatiently, move towards the doors. There's a rush of exhilaration as they set foot on the arrival platform. Soon many of them are running around excitedly, even leaving their luggage unattended. The reason becomes apparent when they wield their cameras and take pictures of the train against the backdrop of the old Keretapi Tanah Melayu station in Tanjong Pagar, Singapore.

Both young and old pose with the train, the tracks and the jaded grey walls of

returning the same day.

"For them, the joy rides are their way of saying goodbye to this grand old station," says Abdul Rahman with a twinkle in his kindly eyes. It's as if those eyes are hiding his true feelings of having to vacate the station that has been the southern-most home to KTM for the last 79 years.

## Last ride

At 10.30 tonight, the *Ekspres Senandung Malam* will leave Tanjong Pagar station for the last time. Abdul Rahman will join other KTM staff and passengers for that momentous final journey that signals the closing of the historic station.

Tomorrow, the doors of the station as well as the one in Bukit Timah will be sealed as Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad stops its

style that oozes with the grandeur and romanticism of the old days.

Such excellent portrayal of art deco is said to exist in only one other train station in the world, the Helsinki Train Station in Finland.

The Tanjong Pagar architectural treasure is charmingly warm and inviting. Compare this to the cold, white walls of the Woodlands Checkpoint with its glass and steel, and you'll know why people get all melancholic over the fate of the Tanjong Pagar station. Perhaps they want to hang on to the last thread binding Malaysia-Singapore rail history when the two countries were one nation. That thread holds the Malaya banner before the two countries parted in 1965.

Malaysia-Singapore joint-venture company.

This new development is sending shivers down the spine of heritage lovers. But consolation comes with an assurance by Singapore that the old station building will be preserved. If the building architects of the 1930s, Swan and McLaren, were alive today, they would heave a sigh of relief. So would the Italian sculptor Angelo Vannetti whose fine sculptures tower above the arches framing the station's front entrances. The four giant stone figures look triumphant as they depict the economic pillars of the then British Malaya: Agriculture, commerce, transport and industry.

## Architectural beauty

The wall panels at the



KTM has been plying to and from Singapore for nearly 80 years

and the grand grey facade of the station located at the fringe of Singapore's central business district.

Watching them brings a smile to the face of Abdul Rahman Mahmood, the relief station master on duty that day. He tells me that in all his 12 years of service with KTM in Singapore, the last one month has been the most memorable.

Abdul Rahman finds it especially amusing to see so many Singaporeans taking joy rides on the KTM trains from Tanjong Pagar to Johor Baru or further up to Kluang, and

rail services to the southern end of Singapore. KTMB's southern-most terminus will now be at the Woodlands Train Checkpoint in north Singapore.

#### Old vs modern

Tanjong Pagar is half an hour's ride away from Woodlands Checkpoint. The two are as different as ice and fire. It's a grand old world within the regal facade of the Tanjong Pagar station with art deco architectural

The Tanjong Pagar station in Keppel Road is the last piece of Malaya in Singapore land.

The railway tracks running on prime land practically cut the island into two. The parcels of land belonging to KTMB, including the Tanjong Pagar site, will be jointly developed by M-S Pte Ltd, a

entrance have star-like engraving with eight pointed sides symbolising harmony and balance.

The main hall has a vaulted ceiling so lofty it makes you feel as if you are standing in a



10/15.

# Tanjong Pagar

With nostalgia as she takes one of  
s to Tanjong Pagar

hollow three-storey building. Inside is cool and airy, as the building has been cleverly designed for the tropical climate. Oriental elements such as the green-tiled roof add to the timeless beauty of this building.

The vaulted hallway and ceiling would look pale if not for six colourful giant mosaic panels mounted high onto the walls. The panels have batik-like mural paintings depicting Malaya's economic activities of the time — tin mining, rubber tapping, padi planting, coconut planting and other agricultural activities and maritime trade.

The paintings bear the scenes of the past vividly. But as the curtains come down at the station, even the lovely paintings can't lift our spirits.

## Closing shop

Darkness envelops the sky outside as if signalling the station's impending closure. Nostalgia fills the air inside. But it gets heady too, with the noise and aroma coming

from the M. Hasan Railway Food Station with 10 stalls cooking a storm. Never mind that the floors are grimy and the old wall fans have a thick layer of dust. This 35-year-old eatery still lures the crowd. Not just travellers but also city folks on the prowl for good grub.

Husin Nasaruddin's stall of 15 years offers North Indian cuisine, alongside stalls selling Malay, Chinese and other dishes. What'll happen to these when the station closes?

"I'll go back to Johor Baru and run my stall there," says Husin, who seems reluctant to say much. Perhaps the pain of moving is silently eating him.

Workers at the other stalls, busy tending to the stream of customers, have no idea what the stall owners will do. Some think they'll simply close shop. It'll be the same fate for the Habib Railway Book Store and Money Changer that's about half the age of the old station. "We are just going to move out," says Haja Najimuddin as he bemoans

the fate of the store owned by his uncle.

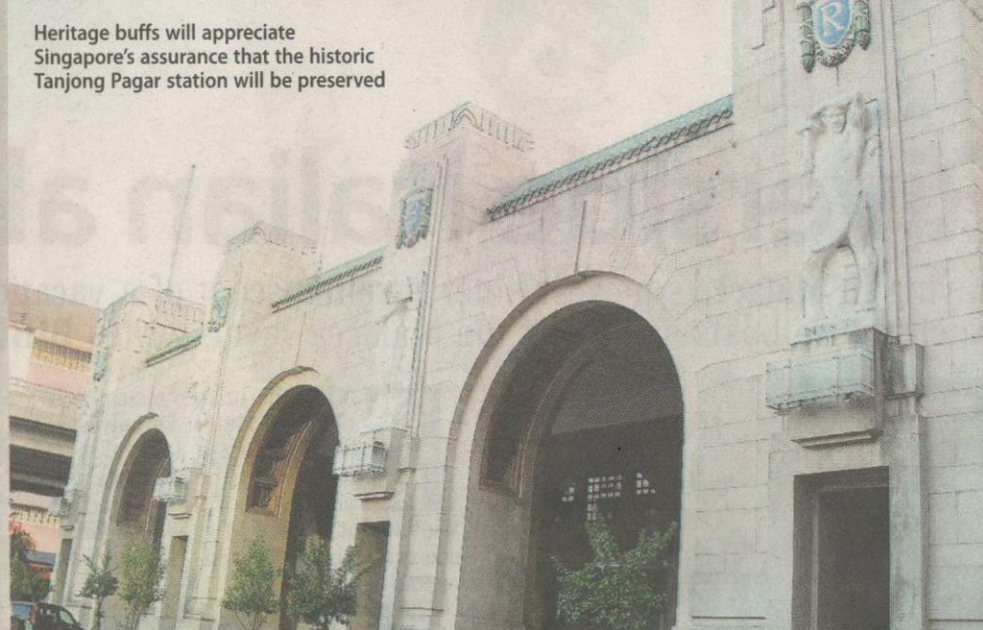
For years, it's been an institution of sorts in the station and very much a part of its fixtures, like the proud emblem of the Federated Malay States Railway on the wall towering above the station lobby. Look up and you can't miss the initials — FMSR. Dig deeper and you'll learn that FMSR was the consolidated railroad operator in Malaya during the first half of the 20th Century (1901-1941). The outfit was named after the Federated Malay States dating back to 1896. FMSR was formed five years later, with its rail lines spanning from Padang Besar in the north of the peninsula to Singapore in the south.

## Looking back

At the official opening of the station on May 2, 1932, by the then Governor of Singapore, Sir Cecil Clementi, the vision for the station was unveiled.

Sir Cecil said in his speech: "We stand

Heritage buffs will appreciate Singapore's assurance that the historic Tanjong Pagar station will be preserved



here at the southernmost tip of the continent of Asia, and, since the Johor Strait is now spanned by a causeway that was opened to traffic on June 28, 1924, we may even say that we stand at the southernmost tip of mainland Asia... this point is, therefore, a real terminus as well as a natural junction between land-borne and sea-borne traffic, and it is very right that the terminal station of the Malayan railway system should be built in Singapore, the gateway between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and immediately opposite the Tanjong Pagar docks, where every facility will be afforded for interchange between railway and ocean shipping. I have not the slightest doubt that, for centuries, this Singapore terminal station will stand here as one of the most nodal points in the



Husin at his stall. Customers say he serves the best chapati and minced meat in Singapore

whole world's scheme of communications."

The governor could not have, at that time, envisaged that the station would, today, be relegated to the backwaters of history.

Farewell, Tanjong Pagar!



Abdul Rahman will join other passengers on the last train ride out of Tanjong Pagar tonight

FMSR emblems — a proud reminder of the rail history between Malaysia and Singapore

