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Defending the Halls of Justice

Balinese Iconic Kerthagosa in Desperate Need of Conservation

(11/25/2011) The physical condition of *Kerthagosa* – the former *Royal Court of Klungkung* – is deteriorating badly with the historically important buildings going to ruin, classic Balinese ornamentation on the court buildings being lost and the classic *Kemasan* paintings that decorate the ceilings falling victim to the ravages of time.

The head of the *Cultural and Tourism Office* in Klungkung, Nengah Wijana, told the *Bali Post* on Thursday, November 24, 2011, that: “It must be admitted, the condition (of the site) is fading. We are trying to get funding for renovation and restoration.”

The construction of the site dates from 1686 and represents the remaining vestiges of the *Semarapura Klungkung Royal Palace*. The site as it exists today is comprised primarily of two buildings – the *Bale Kerthagosa* and the *Bale Kambang*. The *Bale Kambang* is surrounded by pools and gardens. The *Kerthagosa*, which served as a court of justice in the past, is distinguished by a series of dramatic *Kemasan* painting embedded in the ceiling graphically portraying the punishments awaiting those who transgress social norms.

The search for funding to save the site includes appeals to the regional budget of Klungkung as well as to the central governments via the *Ministry of Tourism and the Creative Economy*. Following a direct appeal by the vice- regent of Klungkung, Tjokorda Gede Agung, to the Ministry, officials were dispatched from Jakarta to personally inspect the historical site. Wijana said the officials promised to fight for funding to restore the project in the 2012 budgetary process.

The visiting cultural experts from Jakarta were handed a study recently done by the *University of Indonesia* putting the cost of restoration at the site at Rp. 5 billion (US\$555,000). Wijana said: “The renovation and restoration must be urgently done, considering the condition which is badly deteriorating. If we have yet to receive funding from Jakarta, then hopefully we can get funds form the regional budget at least sufficient to fix the most damaged areas.”

Wijana admitted that a number of tourist have complained to guides on the condition of *Kerthagosa*. Many visitors has expressed concerns that the classic collection of *Kemasan* paintings at *Kerthagosa* will be lost if not urgently restored

Adding another layer of complication to any efforts to preserve and restore the internationally known historical site are questions on ownership of *Kerthagosa*. The ancient court is not yet officially enrolled on the list of assets owned by the Klungkung regional government. Descendent of the former royal household of Klungkung are reportedly opposed to any plans to surrender ownership and perpetual care of the historical site to the government.