

<b>Headline</b>	<b>A shade for the future</b>		
<b>MediaTitle</b>	<b>The Star</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>21 May 2014</b>	<b>Color</b>	<b>Full Color</b>
<b>Section</b>	<b>Metro</b>	<b>Circulation</b>	<b>288,916</b>
<b>Page No</b>	<b>1to3</b>	<b>Readership</b>	<b>866,748</b>
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<b>Journalist</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>AdValue</b>	<b>RM 101,105</b>
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Daily</b>	<b>PR Value</b>	<b>RM 303,315</b>



Cool alley: Trees along Jalan Desa Serdang provide shade and keep the temperature down. – Photo by SHAARI CHEMAT

## A shade for the future

Local authorities need long- and short-term plans to maintain trees so that society can enjoy the benefits of this green investment.

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# True value of trees

Proactive measures can help local authorities save money, says arborist

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**T**HE recent felling of trees in the Taman Rimba Kiara recreational park in Kuala Lumpur sparked anger among the public.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) justified their action by saying they were old and diseased.

Could they have been saved and who is responsible for maintaining trees? That is the work of arborists like Philip van Wassenaer, whose job is to save trees.

Trees provide benefits but they also pose a challenge because when they start to age, maintenance is required.

"Urban forestry and management (of trees) is something that is growing internationally due to the concerns over global warming caused by urbanisation.

"If we do not have trees and green spaces, there will not be enough livable spaces.

"In the last 10 years, this is a growing trend especially in North America as people recognise that green infrastructure is of equal importance as grey infrastructure like roads; we realise the value and benefit of trees.

"And just like any other infrastructure, if you leave it alone, it will fall apart, you need to make investments.

"With so many benefits from trees, it does not make sense that we do not invest in taking care of them," said van Wassenaer.

He said that proper tree care and proactive measures could save local authorities more money in the long run.

"While there is a risk of something going wrong when there are people and buildings around, it could be avoided if trees are well managed so that tree failures will not lead to losses, deaths or injuries.

"It is better for municipalities to pay money to manage trees, than pay compensation to victims.

"You will actually benefit from the expenditure in the long run," van Wassenaer said, adding that poor pruning resulted in trees which were prone to more problems."

Tree failures refer to decaying or

damaged trees that will fall off or hang from the tree trunk.

He noted that trees do not have adequate space to grow.

"In a young tree population, there is a good opportunity to develop good trees that are less prone to problems.

However, a spokesman from

Kuala Lumpur City Hall said that tree fall in Malaysia was often the result of natural disasters.

"Proper tree care can only prevent tree failure that is not caused by natural disasters.

"During thunderstorms and strong winds, trees will fall," he said pointing out that in May alone, there were at least 250 cases of fallen trees due to thunderstorms.

The proper care of trees does not seem to be a big priority in Malaysia. There are only an estimated 75 certified arborists in Malaysia, and some local councils have none.

Putrajaya Corporation has nine and DBKL four; but some like the Kajang Municipal Council have none.

In comparison, Singapore has 400 certified arborists as listed in the Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology website.

People take trees for granted but they actually save us money, said van Wassenaer.

"Trees help in stormwater retention as the roots also absorb rainwater and help control floods, offering natural flood mitigation.

"Trees also reduce the severity of air pollution as it releases oxygen and breathes in carbon dioxide.

"Those with breathing problems also benefit as trees trap fine particles and wash them away when it rains," said van Wassenaer at the Fellow Urban Forester Programme in FRIM.

Trees also absorb water from the soil and releases it into the atmosphere. Trees are evapotranspirators as the leaves act as interceptors, catching falling rain and evaporates, which leads to rain precipitation.

He said without trees, we would have to pay more for stormwater retention systems, deal with higher medical bills and spend more on energy which leads to higher carbon emissions

Van Wassenaer has 20 years' experience and has been

an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist since 1996 and a member of the prestigious American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA) since 1999.

FRIM appointed him to conduct research into urban forestry in Malaysia. He was also asked to share his knowledge on the management as well as the care and maintenance of trees.

The talk was organised by the Malaysia Arborist Association (PArM) and hosted by Putrajaya Corporation and DBKL.

## Local authorities need more arborists

Participants discussed initiating an urban forest quantification model using i-tree software; developing an urban forest management plan and discussed best arboricultural practices.

According to PArM, an urban forestry management plan was a must for proper management of city trees.

"All local authorities must have a long term and short term plan for tree management starting with street trees to reduce risks to the public.

"A long-term plan is in the form of a 20-year strategic plan, and the short-term plan is in the form of a five-year management plan.

"The city would need to have an annual operating plan to ensure all trees are pruned and examined at least once every five years.

"An inventory of all trees is a must, alongside having trained and competent persons undertaking the job.

"The biggest setback in finding solutions to address the conflict between development and trees is lack of knowledge in urban forestry and arboriculture; and lack of competent persons doing tree management and maintenance," PArM said in a statement.

Putrajaya Corporation and the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) are currently developing a tree inventory and management system known as SIPP.

The system has won a gold medal in the FRIM Innovation Award 2013 and was also recognised at the Malaysia Landscape Architecture Award (MLAA) 2014.

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## Efforts to maintain trees in municipalities

### Selayang Municipal Council

Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) public relations officer Ahmad Fauzi Ishak said on average, the council spends RM150,000 on tree failure.

In 2013, there were a total of 131 cases of tree falls in which the highest number occurred in April (19) and October (22), which are the wettest months in Malaysia.

"We often monitor old trees that are at risk and are extra vigilant during rainy seasons," he said.

### Shah Alam City Council

On average, there are between 200 and 300 incidents of tree fall per year, said Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) deputy corporate communications director Shahrin Ahmad.

"The Park and Recreation Department will monitor trees in the city through the pruning unit which is on call 24 hours and is also responsible for removing fallen

trees as well as pruning and cutting trees.

"In case of a tree fall, the unit will clean the area. If there are many incidents requiring quick removal and cleaning, the council has a special contractor too," he said.

MBSA has conducted a tree inventory from Section 1 to 24 and information on trees for other sections will be done in stages. Tree falls mainly occur because of thunderstorms and strong winds.

### Subang Jaya Municipal Council

On average, there are 287 cases of tree fall per year and the Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) spends RM130,000 a year to remove fallen trees.

The council has 13 contractors who handle public complaints and 18 contractors who do landscaping. Their job scope includes pruning and cutting trees, and maintenance

work is carried out periodically throughout the year.

### Kuala Lumpur City Hall

According to a spokesman from Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), the pruning of trees is done every six months.

"We have 15 contractors and 60 officers in the Landscape and Recreational Department. There are four certified arborists in DBKL.

"Pruning costs RM100 per tree while cutting costs between RM100 and RM1,000."

DBKL is currently doing a tree inventory and has collected data on 6,000 trees. There are 400,000 trees in the city but only 150,000 are under DBKL's care as the others are in forests.

He added that DBKL also conducts Visual Tree Assessment (VTA) to check for hazards, defects and possible tree failure. It helps to

distinguish between trees that are seemingly hazardous and those that are really hazardous.

### Kajang Municipal Council

The Kajang Municipal Council (MPKj) received 44 complaints on tree fall from January to May and three people filed for compensation.

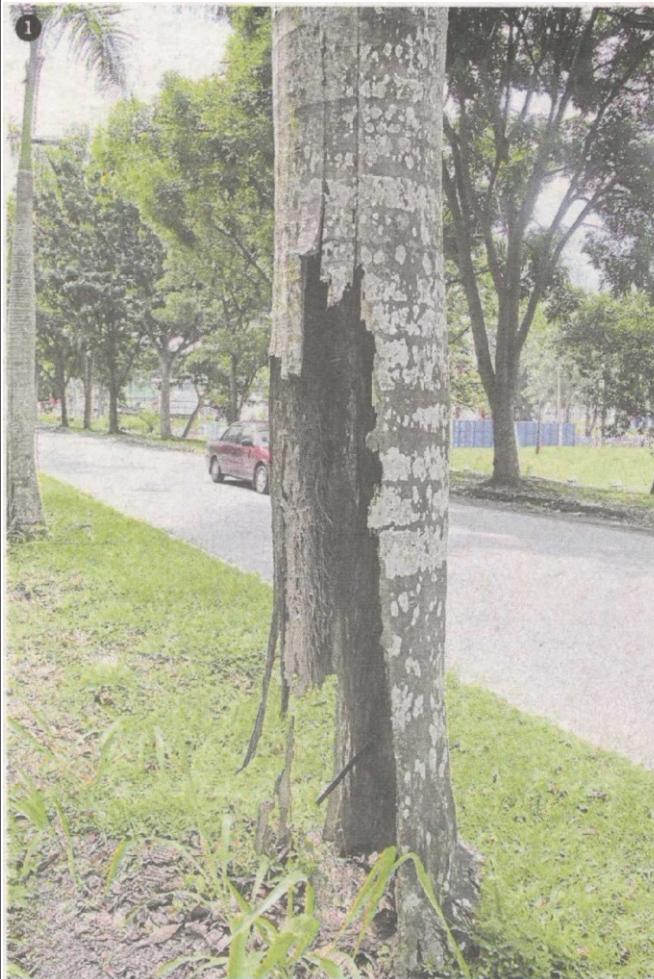
MPKj public relations head Kamarul Izlan Sulaiman said the council does not keep an inventory of trees as "there are just too many."

"The Landscape Department monitors the trees in the municipality but we are short-handed as we only have five officers," he said.

MPKj used to have an arborist.

### Petaling Jaya City Council

The Petaling Jaya City (MBPJ) public relations officer Zainun Zakaria said the council prunes trees twice a year.



1 A photo of a tree failure which refers to decaying or damaged trees that will fall off or hang to the damaged trunk.

2 Healthy trees that have been allegedly felled in Taman Rimba Kiara by DBKL recently. - filepic

3 van Wassenaer has been appointed by FRIM to conduct research on urban forestry.

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④ MBSA staff from the Landscape Department cutting branches of a fallen tree.

⑤ MBSA staff pruning a tree from a crane.

⑥ The big trees by the roadside in Seri Damansara can be dangerous for road users in case of the extreme weather conditions.