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|------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Headline   | Raintree in tears      |             |                     |
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| Journalist | LOGEISWARY THEVADASS   | AdValue     | RM 13,270           |
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# Raintree in tears

Arborists are claiming that the 131-year-old tree at Penang Botanic Gardens is ailing and under extreme stress as it has stopped producing leaves but the park authorities are claiming that it is common for such trees to shed foliage. > 3

## Heritage tree hurting

Expert: Internal infection and rot are likely causes

By LOGEISWARY THEVADASS

THE magnificent raintree standing at the entrance of Penang Botanic Gardens is down to 'bare bones'.

A check by *The Star* showed that the 131-year-old tree, which is scientifically known as the *Samanea saman*, was in a deplorable condition without any leaves.

An expert, who declined to be named, said it was quite apparent that the tree, 9m tall with a trunk diameter of 149cm, was ailing and under extreme stress.

"The tree is most likely suffering from internal infection and rotting problems.

"Proper prevention measures have to be taken immediately in order to save this heritage tree," he said when contacted on Monday.

Another arborist, who also declined to be named, said the raintree could be suffering due to few reasons.

"The roads near to the root crown could be the major cause.

"Besides that, rotting of the root might have taken place earlier during the site's construction and the dieback shows that the tree is losing water and nutrients intake," he said.

However, Penang Botanic Gardens Department director Mohd Azwa Shah Ahmad said the iconic raintree was just going through a deciduous process.

"It's common for this type of trees to become deciduous during Autumn.

"Raintrees are long-lived species with an average of 80 to 100 years of lifespan. It will take a longer time to recover in case of wound," he said in an e-mail.

Mohd Azwa added that new

shoots were often eaten by dusky leaf monkey (known as lutong).

"The monkeys seem to like the young shoots, and this is another reason for the tree to be unable to grow more leaves."

Mohd Azwa said the condition

of the tree was considered as average based on observation by arborists from the Forest Research Institute Malaysia.

"The tree has been inspected and the result showed that the tree trunk is still compact and not hollow.

"We also do visual tree assessment occasionally to look after its condition," he added.

Mohd Azwa reiterated that the department was working on various ways to preserve the heritage tree.

According to the Penang Botanic Gardens official website, the tree is also known as the "Pokok Pukul Lima" for its compound that exhibits "sleep motion" where the leaves close just before sunset and open just after sunrise.

This feature retains more moisture for the tree by enabling more dew to settle when the leaves are folded.

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Mohd Azwa Shah Ahmad



The raintree at the entrance of Penang Botanic Gardens in George Town, is believed to be under 'extreme' stress.



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A recopy of a photo taken circa 1910 showing the iconic raintree at the entrance of Penang Botanic Gardens.