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# Greenery policy lacks direction

AS a nature lover who likes trekking in the jungle, I can testify to the unique heritage of Malaysia's ancient and richly bio-diverse natural forests and complex ecosystems of flora and fauna which are in desperate need of protection and conservation.

Thus it was with alarm that I read of the plan to create Taman Tugu in the heart of Kuala Lumpur with transplanted flora and fauna and other "tourist attractions" at a cost of more than RM600mil.

I just don't get it; nature has granted us the priceless gift of tropical jungles only 20 minutes from the city centre so why even try to reinvent the wheel here? Even suggesting that such a park project should be a priority reflects a terrible tendency among town and city planners for grandiosity and tokenism.

If the proposed park is intended to serve a similar purpose to that of London's Hyde Park or New York's Central Park, then surely another park like Lake Gardens with minimal maintenance requirements would serve just as well and at a fraction of the cost.

The fact is that outside of the capital city, developers with the collusion of the municipal councils have built on any green spaces they can lay their hands on.

More than 10 years ago, a vast tract of the Bukit Sungai Putih Permanent Forest Reserve (gazetted in 1932) just 20 minutes from the city centre was secretly degazetted to make way for housing

projects.

More recently, the remaining green lung in our residential estate, a forested hill with 45° gradient, is being developed into a housing estate and Bukit Apek nearby is now threatened with "development" despite the fact that hundreds of Malaysian city folk flock there every weekend to enjoy its pristine natural surroundings.

Besides this destruction of green lungs in and near our housing area, we have observed the felling of so many large old trees by our local authorities that we suspect it to be a tree cutting scam.

One of the most beautiful and cooling features of Malaysian towns and villages is our heritage

of banyan trees and even these are not being spared. Just recently, three huge healthy looking banyan trees were hacked down near our local market.

One excuse for this tree cutting spree is that they are diseased and cutting them down prevents contamination. Some time ago, our residents association asked the local council to prune the trees around the only playground in our area.

The council responded by suggesting that all the trees be cut down instead. And although we strongly opposed the plan, a short time later workers from the council came and felled ALL the trees around the playground that were at least 40 years old. Their excuse was that the trees were diseased.

How are these decisions being made? It is vital that the **Forest Research institute of Malaysia** steps in to investigate whether trees cut by local councils in Malaysia have indeed been stricken by some form of disease.

State governments throughout Malaysia should be accountable for the numbers of trees cut and the amount spent by municipal councils on such contracts. The MACC must investigate if there are favoured contractors who are given the bulk of these contracts.

A socially responsible urban policy aimed at ensuring the overall physical and mental health of all our people and especially our children would provide a park near every housing estate in the country. A sound urban tree policy would protect and sustain existing green lungs and ensure that all new development includes a green lung/ park.

I would emphasise that this need is even more urgent around low-cost, high-rise housing throughout the country.

Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority has seen this need with a policy of "providing 0.8ha of green park space for EVERY 1,000 persons and increasing greenery in EVERY high rise buildings to 50ha by 2030". Do our leaders have such a policy in place in Malaysia?

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