

Headline	More parks, fewer towers		
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Much-needed recreation: Green spaces and parks make a good spot for city folk to relax and recuperate. — AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star

More parks, fewer towers

A specialist on parks in New York has strongly recommended that open spaces in Kuala Lumpur be preserved, while local experts have weighed in on the Taman Tugu project, suggesting ways to better spend the RM650mil allocated for the public park. >2&3

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THE much talked about multi-million ringgit Taman Tugu project has drawn mixed reactions from environmentalists and town planners.

The RM650mil public park project on a 26.7ha site behind the Tugu Negara is expected to be opened in stages from mid-2018 to 2020.

Malaysian Institute of Planners president Md Nazri Mohd Noordin, who was part of the group of consultants for the Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020, said, during their meetings, the topic of Kuala Lumpur needing a huge park such as the Taman Tugu had been discussed.

"When we spoke about this idea, we also envisioned that it would include Taman Botani Perdana, Federal Hill and Bukit Tunku.

"These areas, too, should be gazetted as part of Taman Tugu as there have been precedent cases overseas where green areas also have residential homes.

"So, Taman Botani Perdana would remain as it is with no housing development, while only controlled and low-density development would be allowed in Bukit Tunku and Federal Hill," he said.

He said this way, the Government would be able to double green areas in the city.

Md Nazri also said that through dialogues with non-governmental youth organisations, he learned that accessibility to parks like Taman Botani Perdana was limited.

"I was told that people needed permission to even have a picnic at the park. If not, security guards will ask them to leave.

"Public parks should be easily accessible. So, I hope this does not happen to Taman Tugu," he said.

He said park's management should be educated on the proper way to maintain the facility while the public should be taught proper

Experts have their say on Taman Tugu

Main concerns include the project's RM650mil budget

park usage.

"We are very good at building world-class buildings but we lack the maintenance culture.

"If there are incidents of vandalism, instead of building a fence and locking the park, we should educate people on the proper way to use the park," he said.

About 75% of the total Taman Tugu project cost had been allocated almost equally in three parts, while RM100mil will be for operations and maintenance.

The breakdown is as follows – conserving and activating the park (RM180mil), setting up a learning and innovation centre (RM180mil), operations and maintenance (RM100mil) and connecting the surrounding area with connectors (RM180mil).

Global Environment Centre director Faizal Parish said the money was better spent conserving existing forests than planting only 5,000 trees.

In a statement by Khazanah Nasional on Sept 4 on its comprehensive forest regeneration plan, approximately 1,000 trees would be conserved and more than 5,000 ethnic Malaysian rainforest trees, suitable to the terrain, would be planted.

"We have many remnant forests in need of protection and rehabilitation in Kuala Lumpur as well as Selangor," said Faizal citing examples such as Bukit Kiara, Bukit Gasing, Setiawangsa and Klang Gates ridge in Melawati.

"Many of these sites are threatened by development.

"Less money can enhance 10 or so of such areas, and this would be more beneficial than the amount spent for one very expensive site," he said.

Matthias Gelber, a green activist who advocates sustainable ways of living in Malaysia, said having a green area that would be preserved for the future was a good idea.

"But why spend so much money?

"I think the Government needs to be clear on where the money is coming from as when news on Taman Tugu was publicised, people began questioning if they have the money to spend," said Gelber, who is often referred to as the Green Man.

He also questioned the possibility of downscaling the expenditure by opting for low-cost indigenous structures instead of heavy concrete which was usually more expensive.

"The orang asli can also get involved in creating some of these structures," he said.

"If you have a park like this, you don't want to build too much structures," he said.

He also proposed that Taman Tugu be connected to Bukit Nanas and Bukit Kiara to create a hub of preserved green lung and forests.

"Bukit Nanas is an incredible piece of original rainforest in the

city centre, but is suffering from neglect while Bukit Kiara is being chipped away," he said.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod said FRIM would lend their expertise to the project.

He said FRIM's suggestion would be to plant endangered and threatened tree species at Taman Tugu.

"This area needs to be enriched to become a 'high value rainforest'.

"This enrichment-planting approach should be refined to fulfil or strengthen the concept of landscape, conservation (posterity) and education whilst also creating a tropical rainforest which forms the backbone of this park," he said.

He said FRIM, in its proposal to the Government, had stated that trees in the area should not be chopped down unnecessarily.

"However, a tree may be cut down or transplanted if it is located directly within the development area," he said.

Dr Abd Latif also said a study must be carried out on selecting suitable species to match the site's condition especially to meet the light intensity.

"The optimum light intensity for a growing tree is about 50% to 60%," he said.

He added that tree planting for the establishment of a tropical rainforest should take into account the future in terms of the educational aspects and quality of the trees when they mature.

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An aerial view of Taman Tugu Project. It shows the Royal Lake Club, Tugu Negara and Rumah Kelab PPTD at top left. — GLENN GUAN/The Star



Dr Abd Latif says FRIM will lend its expertise to the park project.



Md Nazri says development in the area should be controlled.



Parish believes the money is better spent conserving existing forests.



Gelber suggests ways the expenditure of the project could be reduced.