

Headline	Speaking up for Klang Valley`s living treasures		
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Preserve our green legacy

Experts say local councils in the Klang Valley have to set up a framework to recognise trees of a unique size, age or historical significance in order to classify them as heritage trees. >2&3

Speaking up for Klang Valley's living treasures

Arborists urge local councils to record and protect old trees

By YIP YOKE TENG
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IN THIS time and age when historical buildings cannot escape the ravages of urban development, old trees face the chop no matter how rich their heritage value may be.

The Klang Valley, despite being the location of the capital city, has not shown the appropriate care towards these green gems.

A quick glance at the efforts of other cities towards treasuring heritage trees reveals how far we are lagging behind in this aspect.

A heritage tree refers to one with significant value typically in terms of age, size, related event or unique location, and is considered irreplaceable.

As an example, Utah in the United States enacted the Heritage Tree legislation back in 1975, requiring the preservation of "rare, threatened, or vanishing species of trees in order to preserve its scenic beauty and historic past".

In Portland, the city council recognises "trees of unique size, age, historical or horticultural significance" as heritage trees.

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They are listed in database and designated with plaques, and cannot be removed without consent from relevant authorities.

In Greater Manchester in the United Kingdom, there is a heritage tree project to celebrate, record and protect trees, under its City of Trees movement.

The public are encouraged to not just identify heritage trees, but also to share their memories of them.

Singapore protects mature trees from its rapid development with the Heritage Tree Scheme introduced in 2001, which invites nominations from the public and gives all the necessary care to ensure the trees' well-being.

To-date, 260 trees have been included in Singapore's Heritage Tree Register.

The island's Connaught Drive lined with 22 majestic rain trees is celebrated as the "Avenue of Heritage Trees".

In the Klang Valley, trees are downed without much thought.

Try to recall how many places were once nicknamed "Big Tree" for having such landmarks, sadly, these trees are nowhere to be seen now.

Such danger prompts several senior arborists to call for action from local councils while urging the public and corporations to preserve heritage trees in their midst.

Arborist Rosslan Yaacob showed *StarMetro* several trees in town that deserved to be recognised as heritage trees, and needed urgent care.

"Currently in Malaysia, we do not have standard criteria for heritage tree, nor a register and planting records of old trees, making things difficult.

"The only way to tell the value of the tree now is by the size; the bigger one is older and higher in value," he said, but commended Kuala Lumpur City Hall for giving more attention to the concern in recent years.

He pointed out that arborists endeavoured to better protect

mature trees by highlighting their economic values through the Thyre Method, which would take into account the social, environmental and health (physical) factors of the tree.

Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) senior research officer Adnan Mohammad said highlighting the value of a tree in dollars and cents helped create better awareness of its preservation to a certain extent.

However, he stressed that more needed to be done to acknowledge them as heritage trees.

"Large trees are often landmarks of a town and should not be simply chopped down, they are our heritage as they signify the

years the place has been through," he said.

He noted that Section 35A of the Town and Country Planning Act stated that the Tree Preservation Order that would give the local planning authority the power to prevent the felling of any tree or trees, but the clause was not used often enough.

He said local councils should take the lead in registering heritage trees and setting regulations to protect them, but sadly, most cities in the country rather sacrificed precious huge trees due to lack of awareness.

Efforts by the authorities in Taiping, Kuala Kangsar, Penang and Melaka in preserving heritage trees should be emulated by other city administrations.

"Quite a number of city councils have a trees information system but, do they really put in the data?" he asked.

Both arborists reiterated the importance of maintaining these old trees professionally because they were often under high stress in the polluted urban setting.

They also suggested ways to educate the public on heritage trees, among them to work with tour guides to share about their wonders.

"Sometimes, people are too sensitive about trees thinking that they may topple easily but in fact, the trees will not be dangerous as Rosslan says there is no standard criteria in Malaysia for heritage tree, nor a register and planting records of old trees.

long as the local authority engages the right people to inspect and monitor," Adnan said.

"If City Hall just chops down trees whenever the public pressures them, then Kuala Lumpur will lose out a lot in the long run," he added.

Forest Research Institute Malaysia

The forest is a man-made wonder conceived under the British, way back in 1927.

Who would have thought that the breathtaking green gem was once a barren, abandoned mining land.

Hence, it is only deserving that FRIM was nominated as a Unesco Heritage Site in July, alongside Royal Belum State Park in Perak and the Quartz Ridge of Gombak in Selangor.

It is said to be the biggest and oldest man-made tropical forest in the world.

FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod initiated the push for world heritage status since 2008; the forest gained the National Heritage status in 2012.

Rain Tree (*Samanea Saman* or *Hujan-Hujan*), in front of Menara

Adnan says if City Hall just chops down trees whenever the public pressures them, Kuala Lumpur will lose out a lot in the long run.

IMC, Jalan Sultan Ismail

Rosslan first highlighted an epic tree standing in front of Menara IMC, "This tree's economic value is estimated to be RM1.1mil," he said,

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adding that he was shown a photo of the tree taken in 1960s, but it could well be a century old.

“Even if we do not put it in dollars and cents, this tree can just take our breath away with its lush canopy and ample girth.

“So many tourists disembarking here for Concorde Hotel were in awe when they saw this tree!

“This tree has the potential to become our Heritage Tree” he enthused.

Menara IMC’s assistant building manager Raingit Singh said not just the employees here, even the head-
of the tree.

“Employees take it upon themselves to guard the tree from vandalism and littering, it is like a pillar of our company,” he said.

The company foots the tree’s maintenance costs and recently paid RM25,000 for two sessions to treat its dead branches and other health concerns.

Jelutong Tree (Dyera Costulata), KL Tower

Raingit Singh said Menara IMC employees make it a point to keep the Rain Tree from harm.

There is something as imposing as the KL Tower within the compound of this national landmark – a Jelutong tree close to 100 years old.

It is learned that an extra RM430,000 was spent on the tower’s construction in order to preserve this tree.

Not only was the tower’s position shifted to avoid it, extra reinforcing measures were used to protect it during construction.

Rosslan noted that the Jelutong

produced white latex used for making chewing gum, and the drops of exudate on its trunk would be interesting sights for city dwellers.

While the Jelutong tree is next to the Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve that has kept trees as old, but it is extra unique because of its visibility and the efforts put in to conserve it, Rosslan explained.

Rain Trees next to Dataran Merdeka, in front of KL Library

The two lush rain trees standing among the country’s historical landmarks must have been witness to so many significant moments, but sadly no written record or old photo of them is found yet.

“Not many would think of jotting down the date when they plant a tree, as the significance is only seen decades later,” Rosslan said.

Nevertheless, these two trees with stunning crowns are easily over 90 years old, he said.

“Being situated amid national icons is another unique aspect of these two trees.

“They also show that trees are important elements in the whole tapestry of our city and should therefore be recognised, respected and handled with care,” he added.



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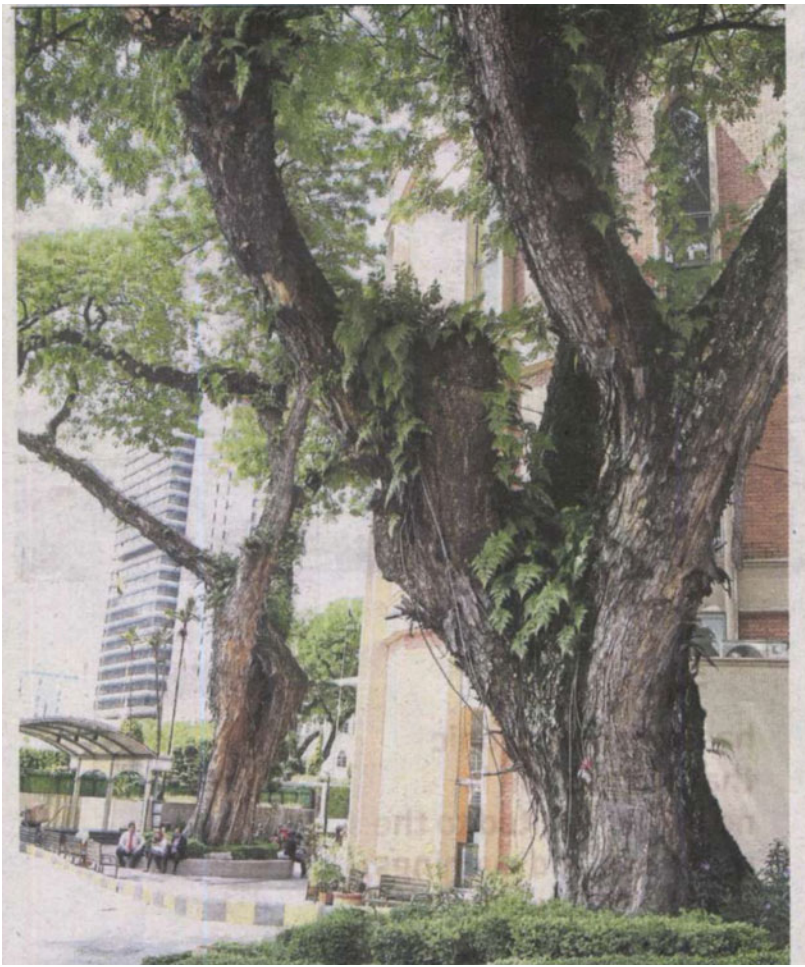
KL Tower is preserving this towering Jelutong tree that is easily more than 100 years old. It stands within the compound of this national landmark.

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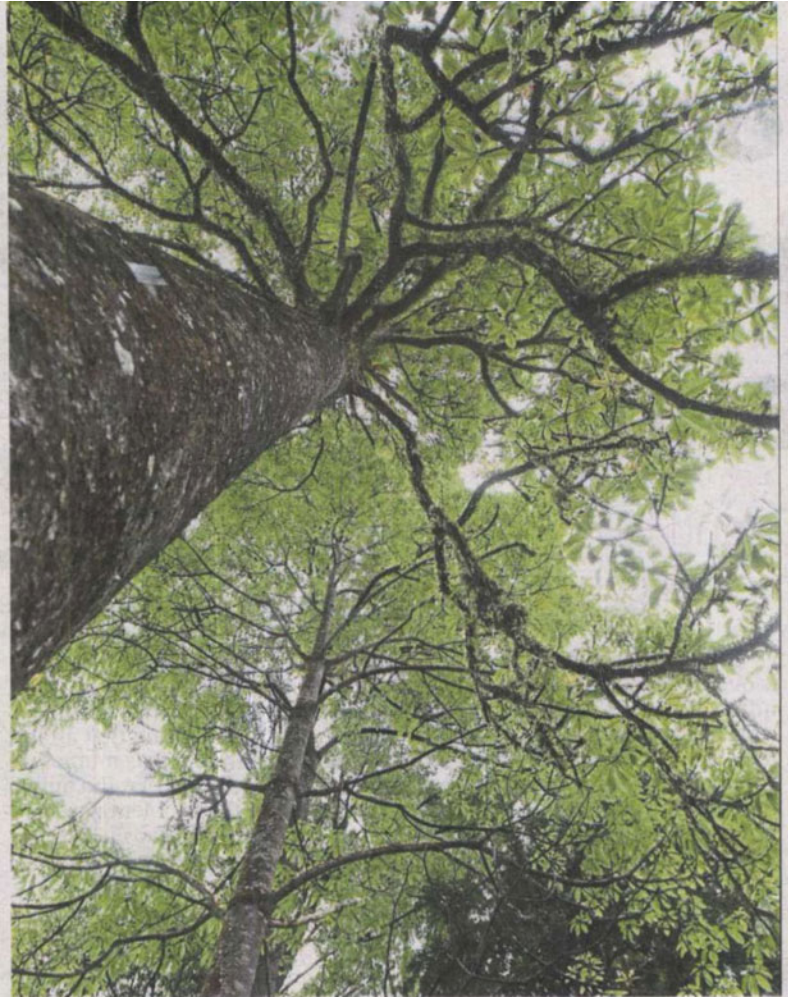
Much-admired tree: The Rain Tree (Samanea Saman or Hujan-Hujan), in front of Menara IMC, Jalan Sultan Ismail in Kuala Lumpur, was unofficially adopted by the company which frequently foots the bill to care for it. — LOW LAY PHON/The Star

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Two majestic Rain Trees in front of KL Library deserve to be recognised as Heritage Trees.

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Two of the Jelutong trees in FRIM.



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A signboard that gives visitors to KL Tower a brief history of the imposing Jelutong tree.