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PENANG'S HISTORIC RAINTREE TO GO P04

Historic rain tree to go

> Penang Botanic Gardens will try to salvage part of it for heritage value, says curator

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GEORGE TOWN: A 130-year-old rain tree planted to mark the birthday of Queen Victoria at the Penang Botanical Gardens is scheduled to be removed next week.

Garden curator Saw Seng Guan said the tree, sited just after the Gardens' gates, is rotten.

He said scans by the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) to check the density of the tree found more than 50% of it at the bottom to be hollow.

The former FRIM biodiversity director, however, noted the tree possessed heritage value as it was planted during the colonial era.

"We are trying to keep a little part of it. We need to study what is inside the timber. If it can still be salvaged, then we will keep that part," he told a press conference yesterday.

Also present was Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, who was taken by Saw on an hour-long hike of the Gardens for a working visit.

The rain tree is one of 20 trees planted in 1887 to commemorate the birthday of the English

Queen then and is the only one left since.

It is known locally as the "pokok pukul lima" (five o'clock tree) as the leaves close before sunset and open just after sunrise.

The tree, once stood at 18.5m tall with a 24.4m wide crown, is now a shadow of its former glory.

Gardeners have cut down its branches since last year after the tree died to prevent dead branches from falling on visitors.

What remains is mostly the trunk of the tree and a few thicker branches and it is feared the tree could collapse soon.

In February this year, *theSun* reported the proposal to remove the rain tree received mixed response from the public with some stating that safety was a priority while others wanted some part to be preserved.

The Gardens was established by the British colonials in 1903 with Charles Curtis as the first superintendent.

Saw, who has been given the mandate to oversee the improvement of the Gardens, said it could showcase riparian (riverine) vegetation, noting a river flowed through the area.



KWONG WAH YIT POH PIX

Saw pointing to the rain tree near the entrance of the Penang Botanic Gardens. A sign on its trunk warns visitors not to stand under the tree for fear of the tree toppling over.