

Stymied at every turn: Alam Flora cleaners have to get out of the lorry and drag a huge pipe to clean the lane which is being blocked by a food stall in between Jalan Nyonya and Lorong Baba in Pudu. — SAMUEL ONG/The Star

Close brush with obstacles



Waste collectors and rubbish lorries face many challenges in cleaning the back and side lanes in Kuala Lumpur. The presence of licensed traders and illegal extensions add to the problem, leaving no solution in sight.

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IN MOST developed cities, garbage trucks are allowed to park in areas off limits to other motorists.

This means, the lorries can pull up at designated areas in the city to get the job done.

In the US state of California for instance, the bin lorries are allowed to move, stop and park at bicycles lanes, parking spaces, operate in loading and unloading zones as well as in zones that are restricted to traffic.

In some areas, they are allowed to stop at road kerbs to collect rubbish.

However, in Kuala Lumpur's city centre namely Bukit Bintang, rubbish lorries are nothing more than waste haulers.

Manoeuvring through obstructions especially in congested urban areas is the single

most challenging task for Alam Flora workers.

"Obstructions in back lanes and side lanes eat into our operation time," said an Alam Flora driver who asked to be identified only as Lokman.

"It is exhausting having to manoeuvre and navigate through cramped and narrow lanes.

"Take the Golden Triangle area for example, where the streets are narrow and our lorries are big.

"We have to contend with narrow alleys, double-parked vehicles, illegal extensions and roadside stalls that have no business being there in the first place," he said.

Lokman described the job as highly stressful because drivers had to manoeuvre their vehicles with caution to avoid hitting anyone or anything, including cars.

"These narrow lanes aren't in good shape to begin with, but the job becomes

tougher with obstructions in our way," he said.

He recounted a time when he had to carefully manoeuvre the lorry to prevent hitting gas cylinders on a back lane.

"There is no doubt that rubbish collectors are facing a lot of issues, and it is getting more challenging over time," said Alam Flora Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Zain Hassan.

"These obstructions are not confined to lanes and alleys but even inside drains that have polypipes and fibre optic cables.

"Permanent structures are also built over drains, making it harder to clean them."

The waste management company is tasked with cleaning public areas, which include roads, toilets and drains, once a month.

Alam Flora workers also have to deal with hawker stalls operating along alleys where dishes are washed and food waste is

thrown into the drains.

"All that food debris of fat, oil and grease is clogging drains in Kuala Lumpur, and preventing water from flowing," said Mohd Zain.

Working in silos

In Kuala Lumpur, waste management is a complex issue involving multiple agencies and different departments in Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL).

For instance, waste management involving People's Housing Project (PPR) comes under the jurisdiction of the Community Development and Urban Well-being Department and their respective Joint Management Bodies (JMB), while anything located on public roads or land falls under the Health and Environment Department.

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However, when it comes to regulating waste in Kuala Lumpur, the agency involved is the Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWCorp).

SWCorp is an agency under the Local Government Development Ministry.

Alam Flora is hired by SWCorp to clean commercial areas in the city such as Bukit Bintang.

Bukit Bintang business owners want answers from DBKL on the presence of roadside stalls operating in back lanes.

"DBKL's Licensing and Business Development Department is involved in issuing licences to traders, while its Building Control Department is responsible for illegal extension and structures?" asked businessman Marcus Lim who operates a cafe in the area.

"So are they not talking to each other?"

Lim asked how could the building department allow stalls to operate in back lanes and put up illegal extensions.

"And why does the licensing department issue licences for traders to operate in back lanes? Not only are they an obstruction, they are in violation of health by-laws and cause hygiene and environmental issues.

"Where is the Health Department in all of this? Why are they keeping silent?" he questioned.

Some business owners have voiced their concern over safety issues involving gas tanks and stoves, which are a fire hazard.

"How come the Fire and Rescue Department has no say about such obstructions and the possibility of accidents happening?" Florence Kim queried.

"Will this affect the fire department and ambulance from doing their job effectively?"

"These are questions that need to be addressed and DBKL is not addressing them," added Kim, who works nearby.

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) secretariat and coordinator A. Ghani Mohamed said the various departments involved in the handling of waste management needed to be streamlined.

"The way things work in Kuala Lumpur now is that Alam Flora has to lodge a report with SWCorp which then sends a report to DBKL.

"It is time consuming and one of the reasons why these issues don't get resolved," he pointed out.

'Streamline depts involved in waste management'



This side lane in Bukit Bintang, previously wide, has been reduced to a narrow lane due to many illegal extensions.



Ummi Kalthum: Traders operating at back and side lanes should clear out for a day for cleaning works but they are refusing to do so.



Leong: The back lanes in Bukit Bintang have improved over the years but there are many other lanes in need of cleaning.

Improvement in back lanes

Bukit Bintang Central Environment Committee (BBCEC) chairman Simon Leong said things had improved in Bukit Bintang's back lanes compared to a few years ago.

"But it could be better. Areas like Jalan Beranang and Jalan Alor where the mural projects have been implemented are looking better, but there are other areas that

need to be addressed," he said.

A Canadian expatriate, who wanted to be identified only as Jen Ray, said Kuala Lumpur was pretty and modern on paper but some of its back lanes were filthy.

"It is certainly not a walkable city as touted in brochures.

"The alleys are the worst, with the stalls. The filthy drains are unbearable," she said.

SWCorp Federal Territories direc-



Mohd Zain (left) observing an Alam Flora worker having to manoeuvre his way around to clean the drains in Pudu.

tor Ummi Kalthum Shuib said there were many forms of obstructions in the city centre in clear violation of the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974.

"SWCorp has suggested during its meetings with DBKL that traders operating at the back

and side lanes clear out for the waste company to do a thorough cleaning on days designated for cleaning.

"Ideally, it is best if the hawkers are not there, but they are not happy and are refusing to move," she added.

Licensed stall blocks crew from cleaning drains in lanes

ALAM Flora workers had to spend an hour to clean up filthy drains in Pudu, Kuala Lumpur, due to obstructions.

While the job could have been completed in half that time, they found it challenging as illegal structures occupying the side lanes and back lanes in the commercial area barred access to the Alam Flora lorry.

The lorry belonging to the waste management company is equipped with a high-powered water jet that can easily wash off dirt and debris stuck in drains.

Apart from roadside stalls built in back lanes, illegal extensions such as storage space for gas tanks and water tanks as well as flower pots are among other obstacles.

In Alam Flora's way is a carport set up between Jalan Nyonya and Lorong Baba, with a satellite dish perched on top of its canopy.

Since the garbage truck could not gain access from Jalan Nyonya, it had to go to Lorong Baba (which is parallel) to clean



A side lane between Jalan Nyonya and Lorong Baba in Pudu, Kuala Lumpur, is completely blocked by a carport which is preventing Alam Flora's lorry access to clean drains. (Right pic) This is the other end of the same side lane that has been obstructed by a licensed stall. The workers are only able to clean half of the drains there.



the side lane between those roads.

Behind the carport is a stall operating on the side lane. Interestingly, the operator is licensed to run the stall.

Although the truck had managed to get to Lorong Baba, it could not go any further due to the food stall dominating the

side lane.

The food stall owner had built a kitchen, installed a stove and wash basin as well as placed a huge water tank and gas tanks on the lane.

Alam Flora workers had to manoeuvre through the lanes to wash the drains that were clogged

with rubbish and food waste.

"These are the challenges that we face every day at work," said an Alam Flora worker who preferred to remain anonymous.

"We deal with flying rubbish from above and obstacles on side lanes and back lanes.

"The illegal extensions, tables,

chairs, stoves and gas tanks get in the way of our work."

According to him, drains in the area are clogged with fat, oil and grease because the stalls do not have grease traps.

"It takes time to scrub the drains clean. It takes even more time if the drains are clogged with cables and polypipes.

"Sometimes the cleaners have to use their hands to pick up rubbish stuck in between the cables.

"Back in the day, we had to deal with double-parked cars. Nowadays, obstructions like these cables are in our way," he said.

During StarMetro's visit, the stalls operating in the side lanes were in clear violation of multiple regulations including placing tables and chairs on pedestrian pathways besides health regulations as rats and cockroaches were seen scurrying around.

When their transgressions were pointed out to the stall owners, they flashed their licences to say they were permitted to operate.

10 back lane obstruction hotspots in Kuala Lumpur



> Lorong Baba, Pudu

> Jalan Abraham, Pudu

> Jalan Khoo Tek Ee, Bukit Bintang

> Jalan Jambu Mawar, Taman Sri Delima

> Jalan Jambu Merah 2, Jinjang Selatan

> Jalan Kuang Gunung, Kepong Baru

> Jalan Medan 4, Medan Putra

> Jalan Sibu 15, Taman Wahyu

> Jalan Intan Baiduri, Taman Intan Baiduri

> Jalan 9/1A, Taman Kepong Indah

Source: Alam Flora

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