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# Time to nip rodent problem in the bud

## DBKL deploys arsenal of pest-catching devices, calls for shift in public attitude to better waste practices

DRIVEN to survive, a rat in a metal trap at Pasar Pudu desperately tries to gnaw its way out but there will be no mercy as it will soon meet its end, chloroformed and then incinerated.

It's all in a day's work for Helmi Mohd Zin who has been with Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) vector and pest control unit for the past 25 years.

The team of eight was conducting a night operation at Pasar Pudu in Kuala Lumpur. Eight single traps were set up and within the hour, four rats were caught.

"In my first two months working with DBKL, I pitied the rats as they too are living beings. But to release them would be out of the question as we are aiming to reduce the pest problem," said Helmi.

Pasar Pudu stall owner Tham Weng, 75, who has been operating for 50 years, said the critters were often seen darting around the floor and scampering across stall counters at night.

They will enter the cages where live chickens are kept and help themselves to the feed.

"Even while the butchers are carving the meat, they will clamber onto the table. We'd hammer the table with our cleavers and they'll run off," said Tham.



(From left) DBKL public health department senior deputy director Dr Shariza Natasha Hariri, Dr Muhammad Firdaus and Dr Umi showing devices to catch (from left) mosquitoes, flies and rats. — Photos: MUHAMMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/The Star

### Disrupting city life

In 2020, the pest problem prompted Bangsar resident Selvadurai Aruchandran to write to *The Star* about the poor waste management of food stalls and coffee shops in Lucky Gardens. The rubbish had attracted crows, rats and even snakes, which upset residents.

Four years on, Selvadurai said little had changed. "At the back lanes of restaurants, rats continue to dart around," said the surveyor.

His neighbour William Fan, an engineer, has complained that the rats were so big that even rat glue traps at his home could not hold them down.

"The rats are as big as kittens. They bite my shoes and leave their droppings behind," said Fan who fears his two young children may get bitten.

Crows and pigeons are also irritating residents.

Selvadurai said tables set up by eateries on sidewalks attract crow "customers" to eat the leftover food.

When the crows and pigeons are not "stealing" leftovers, they are being fed by well-meaning residents and traders in the Jalan Cenderai and wet market area.

Naresh Kumah, a retiree, complained that this had exacerbated the problem.

"Some of the pigeons are so well-fed that they have difficulty flying," said Naresh, who also complained about birds' droppings messing up his air-con compressor.

One other area which sees a proliferation of crows is Jalan 14/4 in Section 14, Petaling Jaya. By evenings, they can be found roosting in the trees.

Architect Rafiq Ganesh, a regular visitor to the area, said

vehicles parked under the trees which blocks rubbish trucks and affects waste collection.

"Illegal stalls in the area are also not disposing of their waste properly, including throwing used oil into the drains," he said.

### Collective responsibility

The urban pests are very damaging to the food and beverage industry, said Joshua Devarajoo who heads the Bar and Restaurant Owners (BRO) alliance in the Bangsar Baru commercial area.

"BRO members have agreed that maintaining cleanliness is a collective responsibility.

"Rubbish is separated by placing recyclables outside the bin while food waste goes inside because we don't want recyclers rummaging through bins and spilling scraps onto the street.

"Some eatery owners call in pest exterminators on a weekly basis," said Joshua.

"We also ensure our bins are always closed. Pipe outlets are closed with wire mesh and non-functioning pipes are cemented."

What is beyond BRO's control is public attitude.

"When patrons park in back

alleys, this blocks rubbish trucks and affects waste collection.

"Illegal stalls in the area are also not disposing of their waste properly, including throwing used oil into the drains," he said.

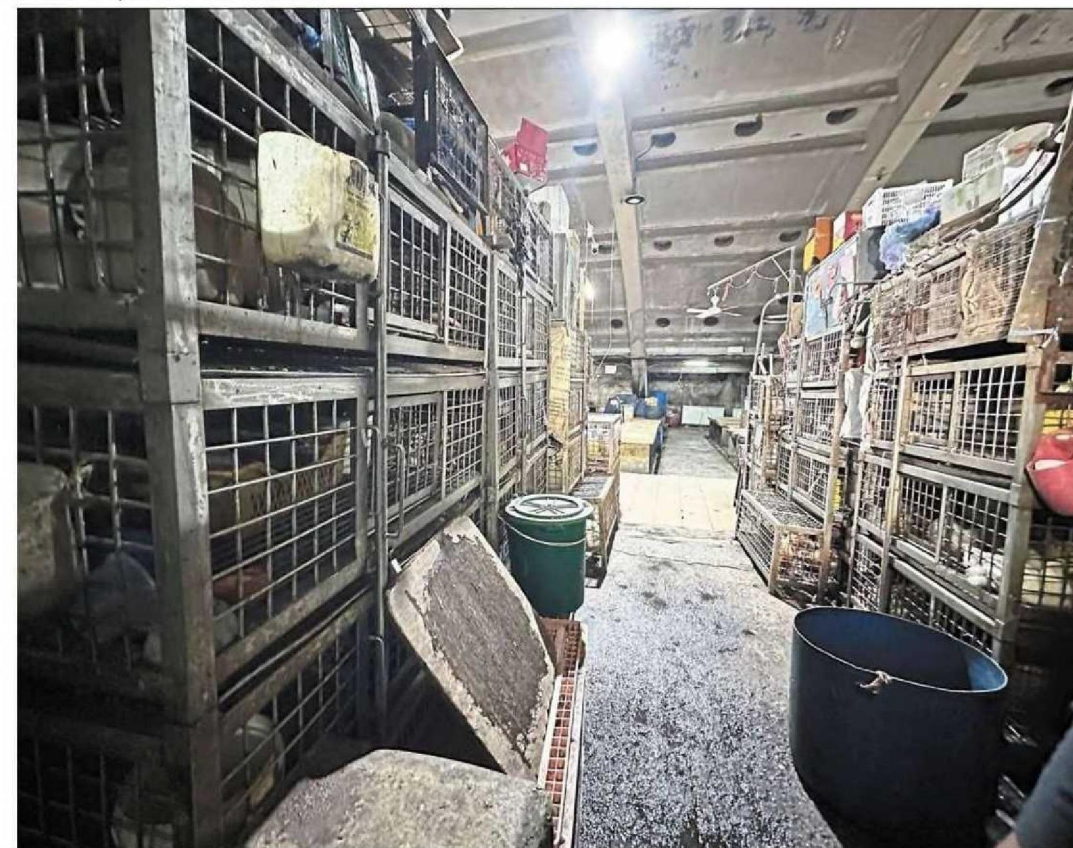
### Huge challenge

Though the city faces many types of pests in the form of flies, mites, termites, mosquitoes, crows, pigeons, stray dogs and cats, rat infestation is one of the biggest challenges faced by City Hall, said DBKL Health and Environment Department director Dr Umi Ahmad.

In 2023, City Hall received 273 complaints about rodents. In response, DBKL armed with an RM180,000 budget for pest poisons and traps caught 65,820 rats.

In that same year alone, there were 90 cases of leptospirosis in Kuala Lumpur. In one case, a foreign worker died because the water tank at the workers' quarters was contaminated by rat urine.

Dr Umi said as long as there was rubbish, complete eradica-



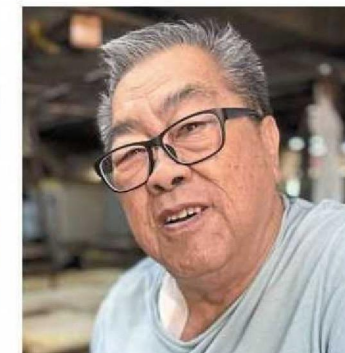
The nooks and crannies at Pasar Pudu are ideal hiding spots for rats.



Pigeons at a back alley in Lucky Gardens, Bangsar.



Joshua showing a report for pest extermination work done at an outlet.



Tham: When the butchers are carving meat, the rats will clamber on the table.

### Rat complaints and action taken (Kuala Lumpur)

Year	No. of complaints	No. of rats caught
2020	149	36,047
2021	356	41,050
2022	303	61,760
2023	249	65,820

Source: Kuala Lumpur City Hall  
TheStargraphics

### Leptospirosis cases in Kuala Lumpur

Year	Cases
2020	81
2021	59
2022	62
2023	90

Source: Kuala Lumpur City Hall  
TheStargraphics

### Nationwide cases and Incident Rate (IR) of Leptospirosis in 2023

State	Population	Cases	Incident rate (IR)
Johor	3,800,000	315	8.29
Kedah	2,200,000	267	12.14
Kelantan	1,900,000	792	41.68
Melaka	932,000	63	6.76
N. Sembilan	1,100,000	263	23.91
Pahang	1,700,000	218	12.82
Perak	2,500,000	510	20.40
Perlis	254,000	38	14.96
Penang	1,800,000	149	8.28
Sabah	3,900,000	143	3.67
Sarawak	2,800,000	556	19.86
Selangor	6,500,000	605	9.31
Terengganu	1,300,000	180	13.85
Kuala Lumpur	1,800,000	90	5.00
Putrajaya	110,000	2	1.82
Labuan	99,000	3	3.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,695,000</b>	<b>4,194</b>	<b>205.77</b>

\*Incident Rate (IR): Number of cases per 100,000 population.  
Source: Kuala Lumpur City Hall  
TheStargraphics

tion was impossible. "At the very best, the pest numbers can only be reduced.

"Pasar Pudu is a hotspot as not only is it a food source but it is also an old building with multiple cracks and holes where rats can take shelter and multiply.

"The fault also lies in the way the waste is being managed. There is an overflow of rubbish and traders dispose of their waste on the market floor.

"Wherever there is a source of food, there will be rats.

"So to eradicate the rat problem, public attitude must change.

"Rubbish must be properly tied up in bags and bins properly closed so there is no chance of it dropping on the ground," she said.

Other rat hotspots are at Jalan Alor, Jalan Beremi and Jalan Bendahara in the Bukit Bintang area and the Chow Kit wet market, though the situation at the market has somewhat improved after it was renovated.

Other districts such as the Sri Hartamas commercial area also

has a rodent problem. For control purposes, poisons and traps are among some of the methods used, according to DBKL's vector and pest control unit head Dr Muhammad Firdaus Zainal Abidin.

"However, poison cannot be used in offices because it will be hard for us to find the dead rats. In such areas, we will have to use traps or glue.

"In public housing and wet markets, we can use poison as physical traps have a tendency to get stolen.

"We have also developed a few innovations over the years."

The latest "Urban Rat Trapping Device", developed by DBKL's Team Sihat 21, has won awards at the Federal Territory Civil Service sector's Creative and Innovative Group, the Innovative and Creative Circle Convention in 2023 and the Malaysia Productivity Corporation's Team Excellence Convention.

The bucket-like device which has a flap at the top is planted underground.

A lateral tube opening is left on the surface and rats are fooled into thinking the tube is a drain pathway.

Upon smelling the bait in the bucket, the rat will enter the tube and fall through the flap.

Another innovation is the double-decker trap which is designed to capture several rats at one time.



Dr Muhammad Firdaus and Dr Shariza showing the city council's award-winning rat trapping device. (Right) A rat roaming on the floor next to live chickens in cages at a wet market.



Fan gesturing to show the size of big rats found at his house.