

Change urban greenery policies, says arborist

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LOCAL authorities should review policies on preserving old shady trees to ensure the right species are planted in the right place for public safety, said arborist and landscape architect Hashim Gombri.

He said there was a risk of root shrinkage and collapse if large trees were confined in concrete in urban spaces.

“Tree stability and tree health are important factors the authorities need to consider when preserving and protecting urban trees in the city.

“They need to check and reexamine if this is the right tree at the right location,” Hashim told *StarMetro* yesterday.

He also questioned Kuala Lumpur City Hall’s (DBKL) heritage tree management policy.

In 2020, DBKL announced it would preserve old shade trees, planted since the early formation of the city, in line with its greening and beautification efforts.

Hashim said the large rain tree (*Samanea saman*) which was uprooted along Jalan Sultan



Large trees line Jalan Sultan Ismail. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

Ismail on Tuesday during strong winds and heavy rain, looked like it had stunted roots.

“These big trees need at least four to five metres of green buffer space to survive, which is impossible in cities like Kuala Lumpur because of limited space and surrounding concrete foundation.

“The rain tree cannot receive

oxygen due to concrete surrounding the root plate.

“These big trees require a protective zone to ensure they are healthy and stable in urban areas,” he said.

A total of 17 vehicles were affected when the tree fell, leaving three people pinned in their vehicles including a 47-year-old man who died. Both bus and

monorail services were disrupted after the tree toppled.

Hashim said based on pictures of the incident, the damaged roots could not withstand the strong winds and heavy rain.

“Root failure is dangerous in this situation. I estimate that the tree weighed between four and five tonnes, considering the force it inflicted on the cars on the road,” he noted.

He urged authorities to reexamine if it was worth keeping this type of trees to combat the urban heat island effects.

“Trees within the compound of private and public boundaries need strict and regular inspections,” said Hashim.

“The local authorities in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor should also consider small and medium sized indigenous tree species for safety and to combat urban heat.

“These trees will be able to withstand strong winds and rain, and do not require big spaces.

“Doing this will reduce the risks of trees falling over and harming people,” he said.

In a press statement, Persatuan Arborist Malaysia (PARM) said there should be reg-

ular inspections and mitigation efforts to minimise risk of tree failure.

“It is imperative that authorities and relevant stakeholders prioritise comprehensive inspection and maintenance programmes to ensure the safety of trees in urban areas.

“While large trees play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of urban life by providing shade, improving air quality, reducing noise pollution and enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the surroundings, heavy rain and strong winds can make trees more likely to fail.”

PARM said the incident on May 7 was a stark reminder to consider the needs of tree roots in the development of surrounding areas.

“Tree roots are the primary contributors to tree stability, and any disturbance or cutting of tree roots can lead to decay, compromising the structural integrity of the tree.

“Therefore, urban development plans must integrate measures to protect and preserve tree roots to maintain the stability of trees in the long term,” it said.