

Tree in crash incident was weakened by cutting of roots

➤ Critical severance of foundation to facilitate building of walkway left it unstable, says expert

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PETALING JAYA: The incident on Tuesday in which a 47-year-old man died after a large tree toppled at Jalan Sultan Ismail in Kuala Lumpur during a thunderstorm, crushing several cars and a bus stop, was the result of extensive cutting of its roots to build a walkway.

Architecture and urban design senior lecturer Ungku Norani Sonet Ungku Abdul Rahman said the incident was not solely due to the age of the tree or the weather.

"The severance of the roots left it unstable and the tree could be likened to a standing pencil. This ultimately led to its collapse, the loss of life and significant property damage," she said.

Certified arborist Dr Ahmad Ainuddin Nuruddin supported her view.

"The tragic event could have been prevented if the roots of the tree involved had not been severely cut."

An arborist is a professional who is involved in the cultivation, management, and study of individual trees, shrubs, and vines.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa, who visited the site on Tuesday, said inspections of trees were carried out once every two years.

"While the 50-year-old tree was under private supervision, the frequency of inspections needs to be increased, especially given the unpredictable weather conditions," Zaliha said.

As pictures of the uprooted tree with its roots severed spread on social media, the public have also raised concerns about whether more trees will suffer the same fate.

Ungku Norani said the minister's comments came too little too late and stressed the importance of striking a balance between making landscapes attractive and ensuring trees are safe.

"The Kuala Lumpur City Hall should have effective monitoring and maintenance practices, regardless of whether the trees are old or otherwise, and whether they are situated on public or private property.

"The responsibility for tree care must be shared between City Hall and property owners to keep urban areas safe and green. The tree-falling incident is just one example of what can happen when maintenance is neglected."

She said while authorities often focus on trees to make landscapes beautiful, they tend

to overlook the need to take effective safety measures.

"Trees add beauty to our surroundings. However, their real value lies in them thriving in a way that does not pose risks to the public or property. Just admiring trees for their looks isn't enough if we're not actively working to keep them healthy and stable.

"We need to change our mindset and start prioritising ways to maintain trees properly to prevent more fatal accidents," she said.

Ungku Norani called for a shift in how authorities approach tree care and said a more comprehensive strategy that considers aesthetics and safety is required.

"By implementing robust guidelines and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, city and municipal councils can mitigate risks associated with such incidents and safeguard the public."

A City Hall spokesperson declined to provide clarification when *theSun* contacted it for its response to public concerns about how it carried out landscaping works.

"The matter is currently under investigation. We are in a meeting with the mayor to seek clarification regarding the incident.

"We urge the media and the public to await completion of the investigation before we can provide an official statement," he said.

On Wednesday, City Hall was directed to prepare new guidelines for the management of the city's aging trees.