DBKL inspecting shade trees

Its Landscape Dept to focus on city centre where roots have limited space to grow
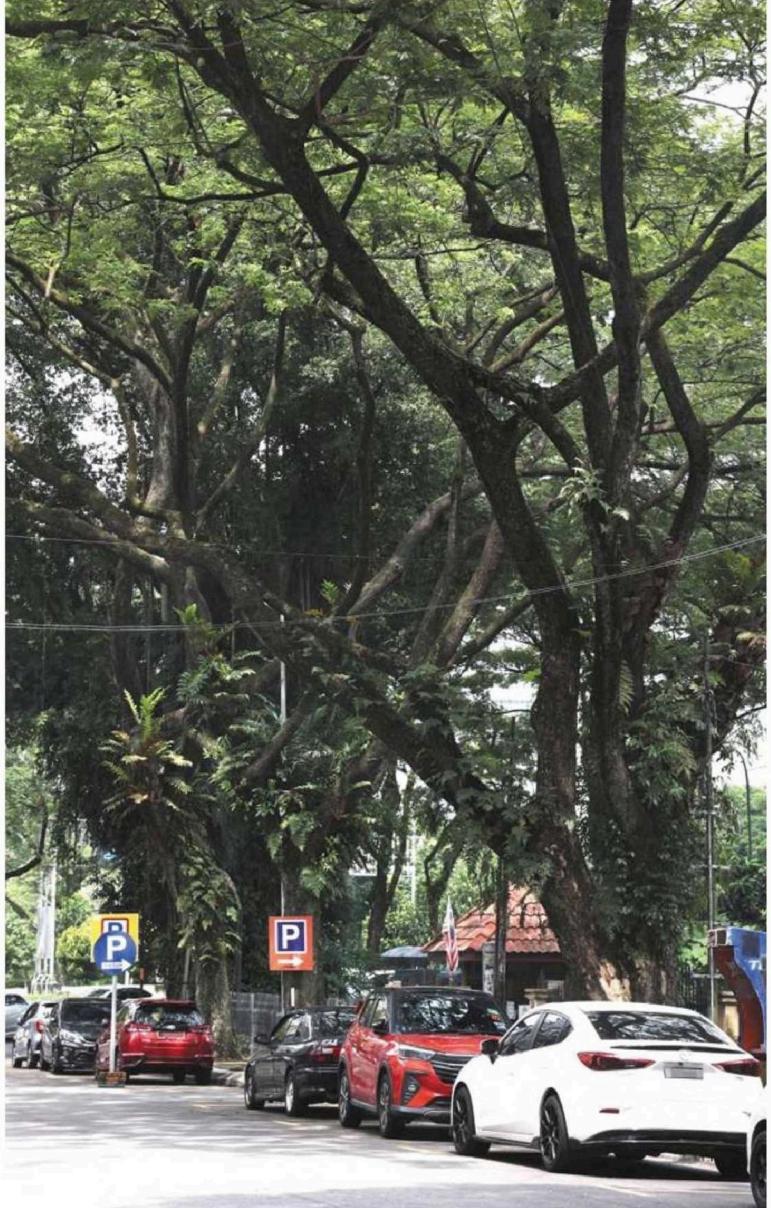
By JAROD LIM
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KUALA Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has intensified efforts in inspecting shady trees in the city centre following two incidents of falling trees that killed a motorist and damaged vehicles and property.

DBKL advisory board member Dr Abdul Basir V. Kunhimohamed, who is also on City Hall's landscape committee, quoted mayor Datuk Seri Kamarulzaman Mat Salleh as saying that more manpower was being channelled towards tree inspection and ensuring the trees in the city were healthy and safe.

"Consultants at the meeting will also chip in to help," Abdul Basir said during a meeting on the Kuala Lumpur Landscape Plan 2040.

"The mayor has also asked the Landscape Department to submit a full report on the condition of shade trees in the city as soon as possible," he said.

He added that the city centre would be the focus as tree roots had limited space to grow.

Abdul Basir said DBKL regularly inspected trees in the city centre.

"DBKL is looking at the overall tree condition before taking appropriate remedial measures such as crown reduction and selective pruning.

"Its arborists also go around to identify trees that need further inspections, pruning or to be removed," he said, assuring that DBKL had an action plan on tree safety in the city centre.

Following last week's incident when a rain tree on Jalan Sultan Ismail toppled, killing a motorist, Kuala Lumpur residents and non-governmental organisations had pleaded for DBKL not to go on a tree-felling spree.

And then during Monday's thunderstorm, a Ficus tree fell near Menara Prestige in Jalan Pinang, Kuala Lumpur, damaging several cars and motorcycles parked in the vicinity.

Storms also uprooted trees that damaged the roof of a house in Taman Gembira in one incident and a car at Universiti Malaya in another.

Abdul Basir said it was difficult to determine the actual cause of a tree falling, especially when external factors were involved.

"While we can assess whether a tree is sick or has too thick crown, it can also be because of wind tunnels caused by surrounding buildings that contribute to the trees falling.

"I urge private premises to also regularly check the condition of trees in their compound.

"Should they need additional advice, they can consult DBKL," he added.

On May 10, DBKL said its certified arborists had identified 28 trees in the city as high-risk and would be felled soon.

The local authority will also improve on its Shade Tree Management Plan by preparing new guidelines – focusing on aged and high-risk trees – that are expected to be completed in July.

However, DBKL had not responded to StarMetro's queries on the location of these trees.

In a letter to DBKL dated May 13, residents group Kuala Lumpur Residents Action for Sustainable Development Association (KLRA+SD) welcomed DBKL's move to improve managing ageing trees.

"We are suggesting a collaboration between DBKL and the public to monitor and preserve ageing trees, through a training programme for volunteers, to periodically assess tree health and report them to an electronic system where DBKL and certified arborists can determine remedial actions," the letter read.

The group said the approach could help address the shortage of arborists and detect tree health issues early.

"We hope DBKL will only fell high-risk trees identified through studies and scientific evidence."

The group also said felled trees should be replaced with a new tree species suitable to the location, with the same level of greenery intensity.

Those working in the city centre have expressed worry about driving along roads lined with large, shady trees.

Communications executive Ruby Lim, 39, who works along Jalan Ampang, said she was nervous about driving on such roads.

"However, I don't encourage the authorities to cut the trees.

"Instead, they should manage these trees better," she said.

Public affairs and communications head Mohd Farid Sumali, who works in the Mid Valley area, said he now avoided driving when it rains.

"If it rains, I would wait for it to stop before driving home.

"I also park indoors, as there is a lower risk of flooding and trees falling on my car," he said.

DBKL says it is inspecting the condition of shady trees in the city centre. — ART CHEN/The Star