



Visually impaired colleagues Hafiyyan Laili (front) and Abian Jambot encountering obstructions along Kuala Lumpur streets. Here their path featuring tactile paving, meant to help the visually impaired get around independently, is curtailed by stalls and the hawkers' tables and chairs. — Photos: AZLINA ABDULLAH and YAP CHEE HONG/ The Star

By BAVANI M
bavanin@thestar.com.my

FORMER senator Datuk Ras Adiba Radzi is urging the authorities to make public areas more inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities.

The non-governmental organisation OKU Sentral president said local governments needed to accelerate efforts to equip facilities and buildings for disabled folk to have easy access.

"We are moving too slow, not just in Kuala Lumpur, but in other cities too," said Ras Adiba.

"We need to improve on the Malaysian Standard or MS1184.

"Many people, not just those with disabilities, but people with knee pain and the elderly do not leave their homes because public places are simply not accessible."

MS1184 refers to the universal design and accessibility code of practice for built environment.

Building owners and public facilities must adhere to this standard, which is a basic requirement ensuring seamless access for persons with disabilities (OKU).

"I tell my friends (with disabilities) to go out and let people see their struggles because we want to create awareness," she said.

"For me, stepping out of the house to go downtown to Kuala Lumpur is difficult; it is so hard and frustrating."

Ras Adiba, who is wheelchair-bound, recounted how various buildings such as offices, banks, malls, post offices, hotels, train stations, bus stops, parks, public walkways, ramps and public toilets are still lacking in many ways despite the implementation of the code.

"Take persons with disabilities parking bays as an example.

"They paint it blue and mark the area but my wheelchair still can't fit when I try to get out of the car," she said.

Public toilets, she said presented a different set of challenges.

"The toilets for persons with disabilities are nice but most of the time, the door opens inward,

'Make KL accessible and inclusive to all'

MS1184 should be fully implemented so public places can be easily navigated, say advocates



Ras Adiba says disabled-friendly facilities are sometimes poorly planned.



George says accessible infrastructure will allow persons with disabilities to be independent.

ing accessible environments as these allow them to navigate public spaces safely without assistance.

"As such, it does not make sense for local councils to allow mobile traders to operate in these zones nor allow motorcycles to use and park their vehicles in these spots, as this will put the people who rely on these tactile block paths at risk."

Both George and Ras Adiba agree that city councils, developers, architects and building owners must follow MS1184 guidelines for properties to ensure accessibility for everyone, not just persons with disabilities.

"There must be proper tiles, breakers, ramps for people with crutches, canes, wheelchairs and even mothers with prams to ensure seamless accessibility and inclusiveness," said Ras Adiba.

"The idea is for persons with disabilities to be independent, to be able to move around by themselves and not rely on another person to guide them," George added.

He acknowledged that Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) had attempted to turn Brickfields into a disabled-friendly township in 2002.

However, with massive developments in the area, implementation of MS1184 had been poor, he said.

"Every other year since then, we have seen two to three buildings spring up.

"The infrastructure, facilities

making it impossible to manoeuvre my wheelchair because there's not enough space inside the stall.

"And if I am lucky enough to find a perfect toilet for disabled folk, most of the time, it is locked or used for storage or napping."

Ras Adiba also talked about how her visually impaired friends struggled to move around the city safely.

"Manholes and drains are missing their covers and I know people who have fallen into them," she said.

"They bump into motorcycles parked on walkways with tactile paving and if it's not motorcycles, mobile traders are operat-

ing on these walkways. This is just not right."

Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) chief executive officer Datuk George Thomas concurs with Ras Adiba.

He added that even the most basic elements of the code are often not followed.

"Take tactile paving, for example. These are surface features found on footpaths, stairs and train platforms to guide visually impaired pedestrians so they can navigate using a cane and avoid potential hazards.

"For visually impaired individuals, they can only move around in areas where there are tactile tiles, which are crucial for creat-



An enforcement officer issuing a compound to the driver of a vehicle for parking on the walkway with tactile blocks.

and amenities are strained and I blame this on the lack of communication and coordination between DBKL, developers and their contractors.

"It doesn't help that there is no dedicated unit in DBKL to deal with MS1184 compliance and look into accessibility issues.

"What is discussed in meetings is not implemented," said George, adding that City Hall departments are working in silos.

He illustrated his point by saying that over 30% of tactile paving in Brickfields were broken or had fallen apart.

These crucial tactile paving no longer serve their purpose and put the visually impaired community at risk, he said.

Areas with tactile paving have also been overtaken by stalls

operating near or on these paths, or used by irresponsible individuals to park their vehicles.

This misuse contributes to the deterioration of these facilities, making it difficult for the blind community to navigate safely.

A check by *StarMetro* showed that most of the damaged tactile tiles were the black-hued ones installed just last year as part of the River of Life (RoL) project.

"Had I been consulted as a stakeholder during the construction of the RoL project, I would have advised that the black tactile paving is not suitable for outdoor use," George said.

"They are ceramic, meant for indoor and temporary use.

"They are not suitable for outdoors and we have highlighted this to DBKL.

"The yellow tactile paving is



The visually impaired say Kuala Lumpur's infrastructure can do with lots of improvements.

more durable and suitable."

In response, a DBKL officer from Bukit Bintang branch said the yellow tiles were installed by City Hall's Public Engineering and Drainage Department, while its Project Implementation and Building Maintenance Department installed the black tiles under the RoL project.

This situation highlights the urgency for a dedicated department within DBKL to address the needs of the disabled community.

"We are heading towards being an aged country by 2030.

"So it's not just going to be persons with disabilities that need help – it will be everyone who requires a cane, crutches or wheelchair to move around," said Ras Adiba.



Allowing roadside stalls to operate on walking paths with tactile blocks puts users at risk.