

'Release city's mapping system'

Move crucial for transparency, accountability and safety of people, DBKL told

By **BAVANI M.**
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: The recent sinkhole incident that swallowed Indian national Vijayalaxmi has increased the concerns of residents here, especially those living in areas prone to developing sinkholes.

On Aug 23, Vijayalaxmi fell into a sinkhole that appeared beneath her feet while she was walking with her family near the Malayan Mansion in Jalan Masjid India.

As authorities continue the search and rescue mission for the 48-year-old, community leaders are urging Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to publish the city's underground mapping system to keep residents informed about the infrastructure beneath their neighbourhoods.

"I have requested that DBKL make the city's underground mapping system public so that we residents are aware of the utilities and infrastructure beneath us," said Save Kuala Lumpur chairman Datuk M. Ali.

"Bangsar, Federal Hill and Brickfields have been prone to sinkholes for decades, with some occurring in quick succession within days.

"This is largely due to parts of the city being built on limestone formations. Limestone, being a sedimentary rock, is particularly vulnerable to erosion by water.

"We've seen older parts of



Intensive operation:
An aerial view showing rescue personnel working along Jalan Masjid India in Kuala Lumpur.
— SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

Bangsar, especially Jalan Bangsar, Lorong Maarof and nearby roads, frequently experience sinkholes.

"These incidents have not only caused delays in cabling and utility projects, but also inconvenienced the community.

"We have repeatedly asked previous mayors for a copy of the city's underground mapping system, but so far, no one has listened."

Brickfields Rukun Tetangga chairman SKK Naidu, who shares the same view, said residents have the right to know what lies beneath their homes and streets.

"By making the city's underground mapping system public, DBKL can promote transparency,

accountability, and most importantly, safety.

"This is not just about avoiding inconvenience. It's about preventing potential disasters in areas prone to sinkholes and infrastructure failures," he said.

Naidu said each time there is heavy rain, sinkholes would appear in and around Brickfields.

Critical areas, he said, were the Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad stretch, which is prone to heavy traffic, some parts of Little India, and the Jalan Scott area.

"We have had complaints from schools and churches of doors not aligning and the ground sinking," he added.

Geological Society of Malaysia

president Assoc Prof Dr Mohd Hariri Arifin said the residents' concerns are valid, given Kuala Lumpur's geological composition, which includes sedimentary rock, sand formations and limestone formation.

He said limestone in particular is susceptible to erosion, which could lead to sinkholes and other forms of ground subsidence.

"Sinkholes beneath cities often develop as water slowly erodes the ground, whether due to natural causes like heavy rainfall or from leaking infrastructure.

"When the ground below can no longer support the surface, it collapses, turning an unseen problem into a sudden and dan-

gerous reality," said Mohd Hariri, who is also Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Faculty of Science and Technology deputy dean (Industry and Community Partnerships).

He said certain areas are more vulnerable, especially where heavy construction activity, busy roads and underground rivers add pressure to the ground.

"We can't always see what's happening underground, but pressure, erosion, and ageing infrastructure like sewage systems and pipes, can all contribute to the risk," he said.

According to Mohd Hariri, there are early warning signs that could indicate a sinkhole may be forming.

"Cracks in the ground, sinking depressions, or doors that suddenly won't close properly are subtle yet significant warning signs.

"When the ground begins to shift beneath us, it's often the quiet changes that speak the loudest," he added.

Mohd Hariri said that while proximity to rivers could increase the risk, sinkhole formation is influenced by multiple factors including soil type, water flow, and the quality of construction and maintenance.

"Proper engineering practices and thorough assessments are crucial to reducing these risks," he added.

At press time, the search for Vijayalaxmi was still ongoing.