

Fears on Jalan Masjid India still linger despite reopening

■ BY HARITH HISHAM
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Despite Jalan Masjid India in Kuala Lumpur reopening on Dec 31, 2024 after a sinkhole claimed a life, lingering fears continue to affect shopkeepers and vendors due to poor business.

Al Rabia Fashion worker Muhammad Shaheed Irfan Zurkanain, 21, whose shop is located opposite the sinkhole, said the owner kept the shop open during the ordeal to stay afloat but customers rarely visited.

"Business was badly impacted. I understand that people fear coming to the street because of the sinkhole but it only affected that one location. There's no sign of any issues elsewhere," he said, adding that the shop relied on locals and tourists for business.

"This area is a tourist hotspot. Many locals and foreigners used to pass through but now most just rush by and cross over to the other side as soon as possible. Rent is high

➤ Shopkeepers and vendors struggle to revive business after sinkhole tragedy

here and business almost collapsed. Suppliers didn't want to come because of fear and the road closure."

Muhammad Shaheed said negative media coverage also worried the public and kept customers away but with the reopening, business is slowly recovering and foot traffic has returned to pre-sinkhole levels.

"The road has been cemented and fixed but there's still some lingering fear. People don't want to walk at the spot where the sinkhole opened up even though the road is now safe."

Hairul Hizwan Bakri, 36, who has run a stall selling coconut water and street food for over 10 years, said the closure of Jalan Masjid India was a heavy blow to his business.

"The sinkhole affected many

small traders like me. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, I had to close shop for a while which was financially stressful but things got better after the movement control order was lifted. Then the sinkhole happened and people avoided the road like the plague. Business hasn't fully recovered even though the road has reopened."

Hairul Hizwan said while the sinkhole only affected one particular spot, many people avoided the entire road out of fear.

"It's sad to see such a popular hotspot suddenly lose its appeal but we're hoping for better times soon."

Emily Liew, 34, a clerk who works close to Jalan Masjid India, believes the fear surrounding the area is no longer justified as the entire stretch of road, including the repaired sinkhole site, is now safe.

"Now that it's reopened, I feel people shouldn't be afraid anymore. The road is stable and safe."

"I've worked around this area for seven years. When the sinkhole opened up, I was genuinely concerned but here I am, walking on this road daily. I am surprised many people are scared to come here. Even some of my colleagues continue to avoid walking through this area and opt for longer routes."

Kuala Lumpur Mayor Datuk Seri Dr Maimunah Mohd Sharif said restoration and repair work included fixing damaged sewage channels, restoring walkways at ground zero and upgrading the drainage system around Wisma Melayu and Jalan Masjid India.

On Aug 23, 2024, Indian tourist G. Vijaya Lakshmi, 48, was swallowed up by an eight-metre-deep sinkhole that suddenly opened up in Jalan Masjid India as she walked by. Her remains have not been recovered since the incident.