



Trees in urban areas serve to provide shade, absorb carbon dioxide and buffer noise. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THE SUN

Need to **manage** urban tree cover

➤ Expert says environment needs to be considered and local authorities should not randomly clear areas

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia is known for its beautiful tropical forests and majestic trees along highways. Our cities generally have a good number of trees, complemented by beautiful shrubs and flowering plants along roads and in parks.

However, the country has recently been hit by several incidents of flash floods and natural disasters. The city centre and many urban areas have not been spared such incidents, which have caused loss of lives and millions of ringgit in damage to property.

An expert believes part of the problem is the failure of local authorities to manage the environment or understand the benefits of trees in protecting the environment.

Forestry expert Tan Sri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor said one of the biggest mistakes local authorities make is to wantonly cut down trees in their areas.

“Trees are a national treasure and must

not be felled. They can be managed and it is not necessary to cut them at all.”

Salleh, who is a tree scientist and conservationist, also said if the tree canopy is too big, it can be pruned or pollarded and allowed to regrow new branches.

“The trees must be managed and not felled. They perform multiple functions that benefit mankind, as they provide shade and oxygen, absorb carbon dioxide and buffer noise, especially in the city.”

Salleh said trees are beautiful and those along our highways enhance the beauty of the surroundings.

“Without trees, the areas would look barren and not aesthetically pleasing.

“Local authorities fell trees without consulting experts such as the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), although it is one of the foremost forest institutes in the world, and its office is within the city.

“There is a fairly new profession called an arborist or tree surgeon, and they are

tree specialists. Foresters are also knowledgeable about urban foliage and there is a discipline called urban forestry, which combines urban planning and forestry. Local authorities should refer to these experts before felling any trees,” he said.

While urging local authorities to work smarter and use technical knowledge to manage tree cover, he said: “Leadership is an issue here. The leadership at local authorities must be more aware and concerned about the environment.”

Salleh, who was the first director-general of FRIM and served as president of the Malaysian Nature Society for 30 years, said he is utterly disappointed with the situation and how trees are treated.

“Local authorities in Gombak, Klang, Kuala Lumpur and almost all other areas where there are big trees usually decide to fell them without first attempting to save them.”

Salleh said to make matters worse, the wood is also cut into small pieces and discarded. He said this, is a waste when it could be used to make tabletops and other items.

“Trees are a national treasure to be conserved and respected, not destroyed,” he added.