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REST OF THE NEWS

Century old rubber tree still produces latex

SEREMBAN: A 25-metre rubber tree at Jalan Keliling near Seremban Lake Park – estimated to be over 100 years old – has been attracting curious passersby and nearby residents, following reports that it still produces latex.

It all started two years ago, when the Seremban Municipal Council (SMC) erected a fence around the tree, with the signage 'Negri Sembilan's First Rubber Tree'.

According to SMC Public Relations department unit head Shamaruddin Saidin, the rubber tree, its scientific name 'Hevea brasiliensis', was planted in 1877.

"It can still produce latex, like the one in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. We found out about this after an SMC worker who was clearing the area saw latex seeping from the tree.

"Interestingly, based on the formula issued by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), assessments of various as-

pects including age and current prices indicate the tree is worth RM3.8 million.

"Given that the tree has high aesthetic value, we have put up the fence to avoid it from being targeted by irresponsible parties," he told *NST*.

Shamaruddin said SMC then conducted a detailed study on the tree and found out that it was over 100 years old.

"There are a lot of old and big trees in the area, but little did we know that this rubber tree has a long history and is of significant value," he added.

Shamaruddin said it was believed that the tree's seed was among 22 that were brought into the country from Kew Gardens, England, in 1877.

He said of that, 11 were planted in Singapore's Botanic Gardens, nine in Kuala Kangsar and one each in Seremban and Melaka.

"The rubber tree seed was planted in

front of the former British Resident's official residence, located opposite the golf course. The authorities wanted to see whether it was suitable to plant rubber trees here," he said.

Shamaruddin said the success of the project then led to the opening of the first rubber plantation in Linsum Rantau near here. The 647-hectare estate was opened by Thomas H Hill in 1883.

"Negri Sembilan was one of the three Federated Malay States besides Perak and Selangor, where rubber plants had shown positive growth.

"By 1920, Malaya had managed to produce more than half of the world's rubber yield, and even today rubber is still an important crop in the region," he said.

Shamaruddin said the historical elements of rubber tree plantation in the country should be preserved so that future generations will be aware of its existence.