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Trees have a special place in Taiping

Residents fiercely protective of nature's gift

By **MANJIT KAUR**
manjit@thestar.com.my

EVERY now and then, a tree will make the headlines in Perak. From the raintrees in Taiping Lake Gardens to the one in Ipoh where a group of Yang Berhormat held their state assembly meeting in 2009, it is a topic that generates much public attention.

Taiping folk, specifically, have a no-nonsense attitude towards their much-cherished trees.

Back in 2012, they initiated a signature campaign to protest against the construction of eight kiosks to sell food and handicraft in Jalan Pekeling at the Lake Gardens.

Although the project would not lead to any cutting down of the trees, the people feared that the RM3.6mil venture would end up harming the trees and the tranquillity of the park.

The Taiping Municipal Council eventually agreed to relocate the kiosks elsewhere.

So when a grand old raintree fell at the picturesque park three years ago, public response was swift.

I remember the uproar at the time. When word got out that the 130-year-old tree had leaned over, *The Star* was swamped with calls from people who wanted to know what happened.

Our email inbox was flooded with messages from concerned folk while on social media, people posted their memories of taking photos under the tree. They also pleaded with the municipal council to save the remaining trees there.

Indeed, the municipal council has done much to protect the precious raintrees at the Lake Gardens, making good its promise to take care of the remaining trees along the 630m Raintree Walk.

Most of these trees are more than a century old.

"Steps are being taken by the council to protect and minimise any tree failure," said council president Khairul Amir Mohamad Zubir.

From time to time, checks are done on the trees to verify their health status. Trimming is carried out only when necessary.

Two out of the existing 32 raintrees at the Raintree Walk had leaned over in the past five years.

Both these trees had been propped up. The tree that collapsed in 2016 is doing well, though the one which fell three years ago was sadly declared



dead recently as it had decayed. A recent visit to Taiping Lake Gardens, shortly after interstate travel was allowed, showed that the park was still as popular as ever.

The two trees that leaned over remained a "star" attraction with visitors taking selfies under them. Khairul Amir said the Raintree Walk was closed to vehicles in 2016 following the collapse of the tree.

"This was one way to protect the trees' roots, which can get stressed with cars passing on the road daily.

"To ensure the conservation of the trees, that stretch was converted to a walkway," he said.

In another move to protect the trees, a new road is being constructed nearer to a river so that another 820m of the current road can be extended to a walkway as well.

The new road is expected to be completed next month.

During my visit, it was obvious that Taiping Lake Gardens was popular with joggers and other exercise buffs.

From my chat with the locals, they made it clear that the trees have a special place in their hearts.

"For the people of Taiping, these trees are our pride and joy. We get really upset when people don't appreciate them," said 25-year-old Muhammad Asyraf Kamarzaman, who jogs at the park daily.

"It is just an amazing feeling to run under the raintrees."

He had seen people climbing on the two fallen trees, an act which he found disrespectful.

"If I see anyone doing so, I usually give them a piece of my mind," said the police force recruit.

As for 77-year-old retiree Harjit Singh, who has lived in Taiping since 1980, the trees are his faithful companions when he goes for his morning walk.

He hopes the remaining ones will be well cared for.

"Even if new trees are planted, it will never be the same. There's just something nostalgic about these raintrees," he said.

Tuesday 31 July 2012 PP1641/03/2012 (06, 19349) (03549) Peninsula RM1.20, Sabah RM1.80, Sarawak RM1.20

HEART OF THE MATTER

Greenies and heritage lovers are pressing Singapore to preserve the old KTM land.

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Raintrees saved

The century-old raintrees at the Taiping Lake Gardens have been saved. The municipal council has called off plans to locate several food, handicraft and souvenir kiosks near the iconic trees following a campaign that collected some 10,000 signatures which was highlighted in *The Star*.

► See Page 4 for reports by RASLAN BAHAROM, MANJIT KAUR and CHERYL HEW

THE STAR, MONDAY 22 OCTOBER 2018

Nation 11

Rush to tree-t remaining Taiping icons

Malaysians mourn fallen lake gardens tree as experts study ways to preserve the rest



Natural beauty: Many have fond memories of the rain trees in Taiping.

By **MANJIT KAUR**
manjit@thestar.com.my

IPOH: Hours were broken when a grand old tree fell in Taiping, and the town council is pledging to take all necessary steps to protect the rest of the rain trees at Taiping Lake Gardens.

This would be done once the cause of the tree collapse on Oct 13 was determined, said Taiping Municipal Council president Datuk Abdul Rahim bin Aniff.

He estimated that there were more than 30 such trees, believed to be about 130 years old each, along the Raintree Walk.

"Immediate measures are to have propping works carried out until test results from the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia comes back," he said when contacted yesterday. Last week, Bernama reported about the fallen tree and many took to social media sharing their memories and photos of the tree.

"Oh no! These trees are like the kin of Taiping," someone tweeted on Oct 15. Another wrote: "I used to see this tree everywhere I go back to Taiping".

Local residents also spoke on how they would go there to visit and enjoy the fresh air.



Clearing the road: Workers conducting repair works along the stretch of road where the rain tree fell at the Raintree Walk at Taiping Lake Gardens. — Bernama

Even *The Guardian* mentioned Taiping Lake Gardens in a write-up last year about towns in South-East Asia, saying that it was a place known for its "sprawling green grounds, lined with ancient rain trees".

Abdul Rahim said the lifespan for

rain trees was usually between 80 and 100 years.

Initial checks by an arborist on the day the tree collapsed discovered that there was a damaged root.

Samples of the root were sent for lab testing. The results are not out yet.

The collapsed tree, he said, was being treated, with the surrounding root now replaced with an appropriate ground overfill.

"So once we know the cause, only then can long-term measures be taken for the rest of the trees," he said.

Pride of the people: (From top) A front-page report by 'The Star' in 2012 about Taiping folk celebrating after the municipal council called off plans to set up kiosks near the raintrees at Taiping Lake Gardens, and another report in 2018 on efforts to conserve the remaining raintrees.