

Headline	Trees are treasures worth protecting		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	26 Apr 2022	Color	Full Color
Section	Letters	Circulation	175,986
Page No	12	Readership	527,958
Language	English	ArticleSize	354 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 17,884
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 53,652



Trees are treasures worth protecting

I AM truly aghast and downright ashamed, and also disappointed with the local authorities – in this case the Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) – at the way they treat roadside trees in areas under their jurisdiction.

Late last year, MPS had at least 10 beautiful *Khaya ivorensis* trees along the KL-Gombak road approaching the Gombak-Batu Caves junction cut down.

Recently, I noticed that a whole row of at least 15 trees had been felled or were about to be felled along the Selayang Hospital road. The crowns of the trees had been chopped off and only the stumps remained (*pic*!).

Our local authorities must be reminded that urban roadside trees have various important functions, hence they must be managed rather than cut down.

1. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, and we all know that we humans produce carbon dioxide when we breathe and need oxygen to live. There is a symbiotic relationship between human beings and trees (all plants as well).

2. Trees provide much needed shade in our hot and humid tropical climate.

3. Urban trees can significantly reduce the ambient temperature of the surroundings.

4. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and other toxic gases produced by motor vehicles.

5. Trees enrich the soil.

The *Khaya ivorensis* tree is a joy



Photo courtesy of the writer

to behold with its beautiful spreading crown. Its timber is a beautiful medium density hardwood that is reddish in colour and excellent for all types of uses, including furniture, flooring and panelling, as long as it is kept under the shade and not treated.

Also called African Mahogany, *Khaya ivorensis* is a valued tree in Africa and is used for a variety of economic purposes. In Africa, the leaves and bark are also used for medicinal purposes.

Thus, the wanton destruction of

these beautiful trees, some exceeding one metre in diameter at the base, is a real shame. The authorities must be held responsible for what I consider an irresponsible act because the trees can be managed.

The trees can be pruned if the crowns are too large and may fall. Alternatively, they can be pollarded by removing the lower branches to allow new ones to develop.

There are arborists and foresters trained in urban tree management who can advise the local authori-

ties on how to care for the trees in their municipalities/townships.

To add insult to injury, the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), the top tropical forest research institute in the world, is just 3km from Selayang Hospital and some 6km from Gombak.

FRIM has vast expertise in tree management and wood utilisation, and also a research sawmill and plywood machines for peeling timbers.

I am not sure what the MPS workers did with the timber, but from what I personally saw in Gombak, they cut the beautiful logs (in excess of 5m) into small pieces. The workers who were felling the trees in Gombak told me they just threw the logs away.

What a waste! FRIM would have loved to get the logs for research, or convert them into useful planks at least. Even the branches could have been used.

Malaysia is short of timber supply now, and even rubberwood, which is an important raw material for the furniture industry, is imported from neighbouring countries.

I am not sure if such wanton and irresponsible practices happen in other municipalities nationwide. To me, the trees are treasures to be protected.

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