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## State of the trees and gardens in Fraser's Hill

I WAS at Fraser's Hill recently and was dismayed by the sharp visible decline in the forest and garden environment.

Many trees in the forest fringes and along the roads are dying. In particular, the spectacular tall palms of *Caryota maxima* have reached the end of their lives and are dying from the top downwards. The pines (two-needled *Pinus merkusii* and three-needled

*Pinus caribaea*) and native conifers such as *Podocarpus* and *Dacrydium* are overmature. Mature trees have symmetrically rounded crowns, while overmature trees have broken shapeless crowns due to death of branches. It looks as if there has been no new planting for decades.

The garden beds are choked with weeds and flowering poorly. The beds need to be periodically

dug up, old roots removed, and the soil improved by mixing with commercially available biochar. Generally, the standard of gardening has dropped visibly because the old gardeners are gone.

There is a need for a permanent forest and garden unit in Fraser's Hill headed by a botanist or horticulturist and provided with skilled gardeners and funds

to upgrade the whole area. Skilled gardeners can be recruited from Cameron Highlands.

In an English garden, the gardener is a highly respected person, not a lowly paid labourer. We need a change in social status of gardeners, otherwise we will continue to limp behind our neighbouring countries like Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore which

have much better gardens.

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