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Make ours a garden and cycling nation

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I MUST commend Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and many State leaders on their commitment to grow millions of trees to make our nation a "garden nation". We can already see many saplings being planted on roads and in residential areas.

However, we hope that the authorities will, as far as possible, not leave large gaps between the trees. Also, in places where the trees have been felled because of disease or where the trees have died we hope the authorities will replace them.

Two or more rows of trees can be planted on each side of the road, if space permits, so as to give more shade to pedestrians and cyclists and so that one row will still be left if the other row has to be sacrificed for road widening.

It will also be a good idea to construct cycle paths fully shaded by trees and away from the traffic along all roads so that we will eventually become a "cycling nation". I am sure many people would prefer to cycle rather than drive and be caught in traffic jams if it is safe to cycle and if the paths are fully shaded.

It would be a useful start if the Government could direct all heads of department and organisation to grow trees in their compounds and especially in car parks. While the authorities have identified certain species of trees to be grown on main roads, fruit trees would be more useful on the smaller roads and around playing fields, on jogging or cycle paths and in open areas. The trees will not only provide shade but also free fruits resulting in a healthier nation (apart from saving the nation millions of ringgit in foreign exchange).

The Education Ministry should make it compulsory for all students and teachers to each bring a fruit tree to the school every six months for growing in the compound or in other areas where trees have not been grown, particularly jogging or cycle tracks.

Growing fruit trees require virtually no effort or expense. All we need to do is to save the seeds of any nice fruits we have eaten, be it a mango, rambutan, nangka, mangosteen, ciku, cempedak or even a durian, and plant them in a plastic bag or tin and water it once a day. Once it is planted in the ground even watering is seldom necessary.

On my part I have planted a few dozen trees in the compound of the government department that I headed and around all the houses I have stayed in. I am now growing 100 trees in the nursery in my house. Let us all do our part and leave a legacy of millions of trees for the benefit of generations to come. Let us make tree planting a permanent programme. There should be no more campaigns.

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Penang

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