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Raintrees near project site `may die soon'

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The raintrees (samanea saman) and mahogany (swietenia) in a plot of land next to a sewerage pipe-laying project along Jalan Tun Razak will die in a month if nothing is done to curb the damage to their roots.

This is because earth from the construction area has been dumped on the tree roots.

The once lush three-hectare plot has been turned into a dumping site for earth removed from the project. Several trees have shown signs of dying.

Associate Professor Dr George Ong from Universiti Malaya's department of botany, said the tree roots were deprived of oxygen as they were waterlogged and were suffocating.

"The soil dumped on the roots is clay and it (the soil) is not porous enough to let sufficient oxygen through.

"Only mangrove plants, which are adapted to grow in this type of soil, can survive in these conditions."

Ong said the raintrees and mahogany in the area were about 60 years old.

"Raintrees can grow in an area where there is water, but only if it is fresh water," he said, adding that if nothing was done to restore the roots, the trees near the project site would definitely die.

"The only way to restore the trees is to remove the soil from the roots. The trees will then recover slowly. If the roots are, however, already very badly affected, then nothing can be done to save them. The trees will have to be felled."

The project developer, Setegap Berhad, said the soil was due to be removed to the project site to cover the sewerage pipes once they were in place.

Its project manager, Ong Kim Pong, said construction work on the sewerage pipe-laying project began last year and "it will be a while more before work is completed".

He said they have been dumping soil on the plot of land for the last one month.

"We will, however, be removing the soil near the trees very soon, within the next two or three days.

"The soil will still be dumped on the plot of land but further away from the trees."

On why some branches from the raintrees have been cut off, Ong said it was to facilitate the movements of tractors and excavators.

Asked whether the trees will be restored or felled eventually, he said he had yet to receive any instructions.

If they had to be felled, it will indeed be a sad end for these majestic trees, especially after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad galvanised an ambitious Nationwide Tree Planting Programme on March 3 with the goal of planting three million trees by 2000 and another 20 million by 2020.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu pledged shortly after, that 72 trees, ironically also along Jalan Tun Razak, would not be destroyed even though they stood in the way of a RM1.2 billion highway project linking the city centre, Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

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