

Selangor

Klang Municipal Council beefs up enforcement action with special 50-member team
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Pahang

Parks corporation and biodiversity council set up to boost state tourism and protect natural resources
>4

Penang

Desa Mawar park set to draw visitors from Ayer Itam and beyond with its solar technology
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Unwelcome presence

The lifestyle of the homeless, who are increasingly setting up camp in Kuala Lumpur's prime locations, is affecting businesses and raising concerns over unhygienic habits that expose the public to health issues. >2&3



In his own world: A homeless man enjoys an afternoon nap on a five-foot way in Lebuhraya Pudu, Kuala Lumpur. — CHAN TAK KONG/The Star



TRAFFIC MATTERS

> In conjunction with MBPJ's Santai Budaya@Kota Seni programme from noon to midnight on April 1, traffic along Jalan Yong Shook Lin will be diverted to Jalan RU 7/1 (besides IJM) and Jalan Taman 7/6 (behind civic hall) while traffic at Jalan Tengah and Jalan 52/18 will be diverted to Jalan 52/2 and Jalan 52/5 (besides OUB Bank).

> There will be lane closures and traffic diversions until today from 11pm to 5am on the New Klang Valley Expressway near the Damansara Interchange KM17.0 near Merchant Square (Kuala Lumpur/Sungai Buloh-bound and Shah Alam/Subang-bound) to facilitate LRT3 project-related works.

COUNCIL MATTERS

> Kajang Municipal Council (MPKJ) is inviting residents associations, village community management councils, neighbourhood watch groups and joint management bodies to take part in the MPKJ Community Garden Competition Year 2022. Entry forms are available at <https://bit.ly/3w4TONZ> and the deadline is April 29.

> Kajang Municipal Council through the Local Agenda 21 programme is inviting communities, residents associations, village community management councils, neighbourhood watch groups and joint management bodies to participate in the MPKJ Community Garden Competition Year 2022. Entry forms are available at <https://bit.ly/3w4TONZ> and the deadline is April 29.

> Ampang Jaya Municipal Council wants residents' views and suggestions for its 2023 budget. To share views, visit <https://bit.ly/3tahDBY>

INNOVATION AWARDS

The Selangor State Innovation Awards (AINS) 2022 is open for participation until May 31. The awards apply to innovation in the form of products, services, processes or technology that can be applied within the community. Over RM70,000 in cash prizes are available for seven categories: Private Sector, Higher Education, School, Grassroots, and three within the Public Sector as well as one special award for the best product. For details and registration, visit <https://bit.ly/3pwnB9x>

TOY DONATION

Toy Libraries Malaysia is calling for the public to donate pre-loved toys and books that are in good condition for the benefit of underprivileged children nationwide. New stationery is also welcome. To donate, go to SS3 Play Toy Recycling Hub and Toy Library at No 2, Jalan SS3/52 in Petaling Jaya.

READING COMPETITION

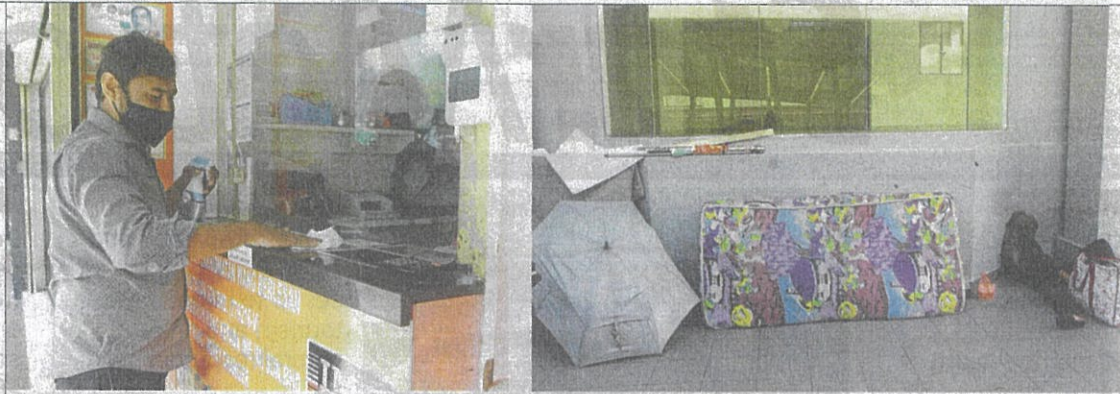
Sepang Municipal Council is holding a competition for the highest number of books read. The competition period is until Nov 30. Entry forms are available at The Lake Library Cafe in Cyberjaya or <http://tiny.cc/BorangPertandinganPembaca>. For details and terms, visit <http://tiny.cc/TermaSyarat>.

LIBRARY HOURS

Kuala Lumpur Public Library and its branches will revert to normal operating hours from 10am to 5pm (Tuesday to Sunday). They will be closed every first weekend of the month and on public holidays. For details, visit klibrary.dbkl.gov.my

BULK WASTE DISPOSAL

Download the iClean Selangor app to apply for free bulk waste disposal services or submit complaints. An initiative of the Selangor government, the app is available on Android and Apple app stores.



Ridwan Aziz, who owns a business in Bukit Bintang, says he has to wipe down and sanitise the area around his kiosk frequently. (Right) A vagrant occupies a five-foot way in Jalan Bukit Bintang with his belongings, including a mattress.

When beautification efforts backfire

Vagrants dirty up benches and pedestrian walkways built to boost Kuala Lumpur's image

Stories by **BAVANI M**
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LOCATION is often vital for business success and prime areas such as Bukit Bintang and the vicinity of Central Market are in demand.

Thus, when a hotel in Lebu Pudu opened its doors last December, the operator was expecting to capitalise on the hotel's proximity to the iconic cultural mall.

After all, that segment of the city is typically an area of commerce with high foot traffic, including tourists.

However, since a homeless community set up camp around the Lebu Pudu and Jalan Hang Kasturi area, hotel staff have been kept busy for the past three months trying to keep away vagrants from soiling the front of the premises.

"It has been bad. We have to keep stopping them from throwing rubbish at our entrance.

"I even scolded a man for urinating at the side of our building," lamented the hotel general manager Josephine Ooi.

"Apart from the mess and hygiene issues, there are safety concerns daily, especially during free meal distribution sessions when a fight may break out because some did not get food," she said, referring to the food handed out by NGOs and a nearby soup kitchen.

"From 11am to noon and again, between 4pm and 5pm, it gets rowdy," she added.

This situation exists despite **Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL)** prohibiting the direct distribution of food to the homeless, which was implemented before Ramadan in early April last year.

Faizal Mansur, director of a recruitment agency, has had to deal with homeless people sleeping on the five-foot way outside his office.

"They don't disturb anyone, they just set up camp with their mattresses and personal belongings and sleep. But their presence is making my female staff uneasy," he said.

"So now, the office is permanently shuttered," he added.

Faizal said his water pipe was recently tampered with and he believed that the homeless folk were responsible.

Over at Jalan Bukit Bintang, a restaurant's area manager Steven

Top 10 KL homeless hotspots

1. Jalan Bukit Bintang
2. Jalan Bedara
3. Lorong Berangan
4. Lorong Bukit Bintang
5. Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman
6. Laman Masjid India
7. Lebu Pudu
8. Lorong Chow Kit 5
9. Jalan Raja
10. Jalan Raja Chulan



Leong: The issue of businesses affected by the presence of vagrants was highlighted during a meeting with local authorities.

Yoon said homeless people, loitering in the area, had turned the five-foot way in front of the premises into their personal toilet.

"Each day, first thing in the morning, my staff have to clean up the area out front. They would find rubbish, leftover food and human waste," he added.

Moneychanger Ridwan Aziz, who owns a shop on the same stretch, said, "I have to wipe down and sanitise the area around my kiosk."

"There are too many people hanging around here after I close for the day and we don't know where they have been or what they have touched," he said.

Many among the business owners also feel that the newly upgraded benches, pedestrian walkways and extended five-foot ways by DBKL to attract tourists to the area,



Ooi: Her staff regularly stops the homeless from throwing rubbish at the hotel entrance and urinating at the side of the building.

are now a bane. "The benches are always occupied by the homeless now," said C. Nan, manager of a Chinese medicine shop near Lebu Pudu.

"They sleep there, eat there, the area is cluttered with their personal belongings and they use the back alleys as their toilets."

Most of the shop proprietors say they have given up hope that the authorities will do something about the problem.

"I have seen government agencies come here, round up the vagrants, put them in a truck and take them away.

"But the next day, the vagrants are back," said Yoon.

"We pay all the taxes and licence fees, so we should not have to deal with this problem, which is hurting my business," Nan pointed out.

Apart from having to cope with



Ghani: River of Life project inadvertently flushed out homeless people who lived under bridges, forcing them into urban centres.

those social and health issues, business owners complained of a drop in sales.

"I rely on my regulars who are still willing to shop here.

"But there has been a huge drop in walk-in customers and it is worrying," said Nan.

Those interviewed are hoping that things may change when the international borders reopen on April 1, but they believe the situation will only improve if the homeless crisis is resolved.

During a recent visit, *StarMetro* noticed that most of the shops in Lebu Pudu were shuttered even though it was past noon.

Many premises had large signs indicating they were available for sale or rent.

DBKL, in collaboration with Think City, a community-focused urban regeneration organisation,



Most of the shops in the Lebuhraya Pudu area are shuttered, with rental or sale signs on display.



These benches at Lebuhraya Pudu are occupied daily by the homeless and those who come here to collect free food.

(Below) A homeless man has partitioned the five-foot way in Lebuhraya Pudu. — Photos: CHAN TAK KONG/The Star

has completed placemaking efforts around public spaces to improve the area's aesthetics. Unfortunately, vagrants have turned the lanes into open-air toilets.

Human waste can be seen everywhere.

A leaking water pipe at a small lane appeared tampered with, believed to be used by the homeless so they have access to water for bathing and washing.

Overall, the area in the heart of Kuala Lumpur is shabby, unkempt and eerily quiet.

The only buzz comes from the homeless people who are more animated during meal times when street feeders are expected.

Local Agenda 21 secretariat and coordinator A. Ghani Mohamed said the River of Life project had inadvertently flushed out the homeless community, who used to occupy areas under the Sungai Klang bridges, and forced them into urban centres.

"The areas they now congregate are downtown, at places where Think City and DBKL have upgraded with pedestrian walkways and benches, and now these are their new homes," he said.

Bukit Bintang Central Environment Committee (BBCEC) chairman Simon Leong said the issue was highlighted during meetings with the authorities, including DBKL.

"The authorities say they keep rescuing them from the streets and relocating them to the transit centres, but the homeless keep returning to these same locations the next day," he said.

"We are all sympathetic towards the homeless and it must be diffi-



cult for anyone to choose to live and sleep on the streets.

"But we are equally concerned for the business owners who pay a lot of taxes and licensing fees to operate their businesses here, and you cannot ignore that.

"We will be meeting with the authorities again soon to discuss the matter," said Leong.

DBKL has been grappling with the homeless issue since April 2020, during the first movement control order.

The management of the homeless is under the purview of the Welfare Department and Women, Family and Community Development Ministry.

In July 2020, Women, Family and Community Development Minister

Datuk Seri Rina Harun told Parliament that the government planned to review the Destitute Persons Act 1977 to better deal with the homeless.

Rina said 1,238 homeless people were rescued by the authorities during the MCO period.

Of that figure, 50% were taken off the streets of Kuala Lumpur, while the rest were mostly from Johor and Sarawak.

However, what is happening on the ground today clearly shows that the number of homeless people in Kuala Lumpur has grown and is increasing by the day.

Watch the video [TheStarTV.com](https://www.thestar.com)



'Human waste in open spaces hazardous to public health'

ENVIRONMENTAL experts are warning that human waste found around Kuala Lumpur's back lanes and sidewalks could contaminate the city's water sources.

Business owners said they had seen homeless people defecating and urinating directly into drains and exposed manholes.

Alam Flora contractors have constantly complained that excreted matter is no longer confined to back lanes and can now be found on sidewalks, five-foot ways and in front of shops.

Left exposed to the elements, the human waste is hazardous to public health as it contains microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa which can transmit diseases, said Universiti Selangor honorary professor of Environmental Health Prof Dr Jamal Hisham Hashim.

"Faeces, urine and vomit, when disposed indiscriminately, will be washed away by rain, which then flow into drains and end up in the rivers and sea.

"River water may be extracted for the city's water supply, and as the public use rivers and seas for recreational activities, they may come into contact with contaminated water," he said.

He added that some faecal bacteria could be coming from Kuala Lumpur's homeless population.

Jamal said human waste also attracted pests like flies and rats; the flies in turn would settle on food and could transmit diseases to those who unwittingly consume contaminated food.

Concurring with Jamal is water quality specialist Dr Zaki Zainudin, who added that water runoff from such deposits into water bodies could eventually give rise to faecal coliform and *E. Coli* bacteria.

"So there is a risk of (contracting) diseases if people come into contact with it," he said.

But humans are not the only ones in danger, as animals and aquatic life, too, will be affected, he added.

Global Environment Centre (GEC) river care programme manager Dr K. Kalithasan said, "People can be affected if they go fishing and consume fish that are contaminated with faecal bacteria.



Jamal says human waste washed away by the rain will flow into rivers and seas, thereby contaminating them.



Kalithasan says people can get sick if they consume fish from contaminated rivers or seas.

"However, homelessness is a complex social problem in most major cities in the world.

"The authorities should provide more free public toilets in certain parts of the city.

"Homeless people may not be able to access toilets in hotels and commercial premises," Jamal highlighted.

He said most people used toilets at petrol stations in an emergency but these facilities were not available everywhere, especially in the city centre where homeless people live.

"So, they have no choice but to defecate and urinate in the open if they have no access to free public toilets," he said.



A leaking pipe in Lebuhraya Pudu that is said to be used by homeless people for bathing and washing.