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CENTRAL



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Troubled water

Illegal dumping and wastewater from surrounding houses have polluted a lake in Puchong, causing a bloom of water hyacinths and algae. > 28&3



Still popular: The mining pond in Kampung Sri Aman, Puchong, continues to draw visitors, many of whom have no idea the lake is polluted. — GRACE CHEN/The Star

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Pollution-choked lake

MPSJ has yet to clean a disused mining pond in Puchong despite receiving complaints from the public

story and photos by
GRACE CHEN

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NOTHING has changed at the disused mining pond in Kampung Sri Aman, Puchong despite the numerous complaints made by the public.

Marked as an illegal dumpsite and choking slowly from an overgrowth of water hyacinths, the lake continues to totter precariously in the face of advancing pollution.

Kampung Sri Aman village chief Mohd Asri Yunus had said they were expecting Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) to clear the lake of all traces of water hyacinths within a month. A check by *StarMetro* shows the water plants are still there.

When contacted, Asri said he had called the council contractor only to be told that they were in "season".

MPSJ Corporate Communications officer Muhammad Azli Miswan said the council had once cleared the entire lake of hyacinths but they grew back.

Meanwhile, regular visitors say that removal of the hyacinths takes place regularly and is carried out by a contractor who has hired six foreign workers to drag the plants out of the lake and haul them onto a

waiting lorry.

Across the lake, land reclamation continues to take place.

Asri said the disused mining pond is actually part of privately owned plot of land and it would be natural for the owners to want to claim more land for their building project.

But Sabri Mahmuddin, a food vendor still comes to the pond four times a week to catch tilapia. He is convinced things have improved.

"A year ago, I used to get rashes from touching the water and I remember seeing fishes swimming to the surface to gasp for air."

"I have not experienced any itchy rash or come across any stressed fish this year," Sabri said, adding that in the past, contractors used everything from old furniture to plastic for land reclamation.

And three years ago, three-tonne lorries were often seen driving into the village to dump rubbish into the lake.

"Today, there are fewer such incidents because the villagers are keeping watch," he added.

For a professional take on the situation, *StarMetro* called in River Care programme coordinator and water and waste management specialist Dr K. Kalithasan.

He has played a role in the rehabilitation of the Kelana Jaya lake and Sungai Penchala in the past.

Kampung Sri Aman lake is still polluted, Dr Kalithasan declared.

According to him, the green algae at the water's edge is a sign.

As for Sabri fishing for tilapia, Kalithasan said he had tested the fish from a similarly polluted urban lake before. They found traces of heavy metal in the fish.

Dr Kalithasan hopes the contractors are disposing the water hyacinths from the lake properly.

"Because if heavy metal is found in the fish, it will be in the water hyacinths as well."

"If they are being used as feed or compost, it can cause poisoning," he warned.

The task of cleaning up the lake was not going to work with the simple removal of water hyacinths, he said, nor would it be as simple as stopping a few lorries from tipping their contents into the water.

"It is going to cost the villagers," he said.

"For one, disused mining pools are considered static water bodies which means they have to be disturbed, either with fountains or paddles to aerate the water. The pool also has to be desludged," he explained.

"I am not sure if the pond has been desludged before but judging from its history, I guess not."

"Using a rough estimate, the sludge in this lake must be about three metres thick by now," he added.

Dr Kalithasan estimated that the cost of aerating the lake and removing the sludge alone could

1 Nothing has changed at the disused mining pond in Kampong Sri Aman despite the numerous complaints made by the public.

2 Dr Kalithasan said the Kampong Sri Aman lake is badly polluted.

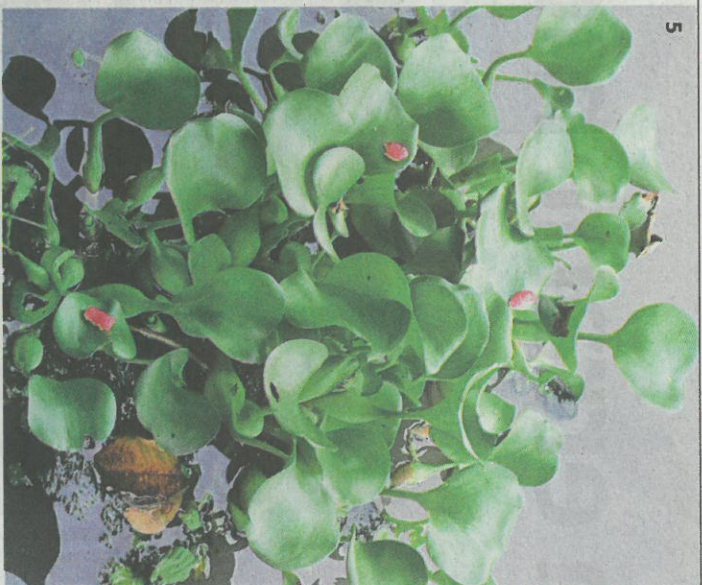
3 Green algae at the side of the pond is a sign of pollution.

4 One of the real problems is in the many illegal pipes running from the village houses directly into the drains which will eventually end up in the lake.

5 The task of cleaning up the lake is not going to work just by removing water hyacinths.

6 One of the inlets flowing into the lake. This is where sullage water can end up in the pond.

7 Water hyacinths proliferate at the inlets to the lake, indicating that there are nutrients in the water.



easily reach seven figures, excluding maintenance.

He also drew attention to the lake inlets.

"Look at the proliferation of water hyacinths at the inlet mouths.

"This can only mean one thing, there are nutrients in the water.

"There are many ways for sullage to end up in the pond, from household kitchen wastewater flowing into drains to food waste from stalls and even water from a car wash operation," he said.

Zon 12 council member Norzaihan Ismail said the lake had been a frequently discussed subject in council meetings.

"One of the pollutant contributors to the lake is the many illegal

pipes running from the village houses directly into the drains.

"We try to ensure this does not happen.

"The young people can understand us but with the older folk, it is not easy.

"So, we really have to get down to the ground to explain the situation to them," said Norzaihan.

The other problem she faces is that many of the villagers are looking to sell their land.

And forking out money to improve their home's drainage system so that sullage flows to a treatment plant instead of ending up in the drain is the last thing on their minds.

Dr Kalithasan said this was a typical scenario with old residen-

tial areas.

But under a new draft set out in the Urban Stormwater

Management Manual (MSMA) by the River Engineering and Urban Drainage Research Centre (REDAC), only rainwater will run through drains in all future developments.

And one body Dr Kalithasan knows that has the power to bring culprits to book is the Selangor Water Management Authority.

Meanwhile, the lake continues to draw visitors. Rathan Rahman, a 60-year-old father of 12 is one of the regulars.

He comes all the way from Section 30 in Shah Alam with his children to fish in the evenings.

Rathan had no idea the lake

was polluted.

He thinks the water hyacinths surrounding the lake surface is pretty, especially when they flow.

And he is very proud when his children manage to land their catch.

This is why Dr Kalithasan feels more must be done to educate the public about the effects of water pollution.

"There may be little that authorities can do for the Kampong Sri Aman lake for now due to the prohibitive costs of the rehabilitation process.

"But it should serve to educate the others so they can prevent the same thing from happening to them," he said.

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soundbites

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COUNCIL'S AMNESTY OFFER

MPAJ launches programme for homeowners to legalise unauthorised extensions to their property.

Not a solution

Maybe it's just me, but it seems silly that the solution to reducing the number of illegal extensions is to make them legal? How about making sure that people follow the guidelines instead? – Chin Mui

Why have rules?

I do not think this is the right thing to do. Why bother having rules if you are just going to let people break them? Maybe the council does not have guts to crack down on these people. – K. Jaya

Hilarious issue

I find it funny how this move lacks response from the public. The council is bending over backwards for this issue and residents could not even care less! – Rick Khong

Out of control

There are 1,000 houses with illegal renovations? How is it that the council can know this figure and yet not take action earlier? – Nur Syahida

Too lenient

Wow, homeowners are allowed to extend their two-storey terrace houses and make them twice as large with a third floor? That is a ridiculous amount of leniency. – Mond Khalid

No crackdown

How did the council even allow the situation to get this bad in the first place? Why can't they crack down on homeowners who do not comply with guidelines? – James Anthony

Obey the rules

Why can't people just follow the rules? I feel the council is at their wits' end in trying to deal with errant residents. – Lily Chia