

A beautiful lake no more

EYESORE: It started turning murky red in June last year, allegedly from bauxite ore contamination

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SURROUNDED by greenery, Aspa Cottage, near Gebeng here, has been described as an ideal location for those who wish to enjoy their retirement years in an idyllic setting.

However, bauxite mining activities near the guarded residential area since last year have become a major concern for its 300 residents, mostly retired senior government servants and professionals.

To make things worse, the once serene lake nearby has turned into an eyesore with its pristine waters now murky red, believed to be the result of the mining activities.

Retiree Nordin Othman, 60, said the lake started to turn murky in June last year, allegedly from bauxite ore contamination.

"It becomes worse during heavy rains, when contamination at the lake intensifies.

"These days, no one goes fishing, takes a boat ride or jogs near the lake anymore."

He said the area used to be packed with people during the evenings but it had since been deserted.

"Even the nearby streams have turned murky and this affected the entire ecosystem," he said when met at the housing area yesterday.

Resident Abu Bakar Mahusin, who has lived in the area for 15 years, said the purportedly unregulated mining operations about 500m away from the housing area, had



Nordin Othman showing contaminated water from the lake near Aspa Cottage, Kuantan. Pic by Zulkepli Osman

taken a toll on the people.

The 60-year-old added that during hot weather, strong winds would blow dust particles into their homes and cover their vehicles and furniture in thick coat of red dirt.

"The mining site used to be a secondary jungle before we heard news that the landowners had planned to plant oil palm.



Abu Bakar Mahusin

"However, the excavators came instead and started clearing the land for bauxite mining.

"We are lucky that the monsoon season this year was not so bad or else the lake would have overflowed and inundated the low-lying spots in the area, similar to what happened two years ago," he said.

Shahrudin Abd Rahman, 48, said he chose to stay in Aspa Cottage for its peaceful atmosphere and natural charm as he enjoyed trekking in the nearby jungles.

"Most of the residents moved here to enjoy their golden years and spend time with their families away from the city life.



Shahrudin Abd Rahman

"However, the current scenario is upsetting the residents.

"Back then, the men used to come to the lake and fish for *haruan* (snake-head fish) and *lampam* (carp), while the women and children would be picnicking in the evenings.

"Sadly, this is not the case anymore," he said.



PRAYER TIMES

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'Keropok lekor' sellers suffer

KUANTAN: The bauxite scare has affected the livelihood of *keropok lekor* sellers in Balok here as fewer customers are buying the traditional snack lately.

With news of fish contamination and the "red sea" incident at Balok and Batu Hitam beaches last week, visitors are more cautious when buying the popular delicacy.

Rosnani Mamat, 34, a vendor at the Keropok Yati shop, said customers sometimes would ask her whether the fish used in her *keropok lekor* was safe for consumption.

"I understand that they are worried after reading reports of pollution caused by the bauxite mining

here. I explained to them that the fish used in making *keropok lekor* come from the deep sea and not from the Balok beach here," she said yesterday.

Rosnani said her income had dropped as many motorists now used the highway to bypass the polluted area.

She said there were days when her earnings were just enough to cover the daily overhead costs.

Another seller, Alif Ibrahim, 28, said the number of customers had dwindled since a few months ago.

"Maybe the customers are worried

about the origin of the fish used in making *keropok*," he said.

Alif said as fresh fish was scarce during the recent monsoon period, most *keropok lekor* makers would turn to using frozen fish.

"Our daily fish supply normally comes from the catch landed by fishermen who trawl in the deep sea.

"Customers do not have to worry as the *keropok lekor* from Balok is free from bauxite contamination and is safe for consumption."



Alif Ibrahim