

'DEAD LAKE'

TASIK CHINI ECOSYSTEM UNDER THREAT?

A concerted effort is needed to check illegal activities in order to preserve the country's second largest natural lake

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MONTHS after clusters of lotus flowers started blooming at Tasik Chini, floodwaters spilled into the lake, submerging the iconic plants.

Water from Sungai Pahang, which burst its banks in late January, spilled into Sungai Chini, causing the water level in the lake to rise and become murky.

Lake Chini Resort manager Mohd Az-



persisted until May. "The water is no longer murky and is improving, but it will take some time for it to return to normal. "This is normal, especially during the monsoon season when the overflowing water from Sungai Pahang spills into the lake."

On reports that Tasik Chini had become a "dead lake" due to pollution from uncontrolled logging, mining and farming activities, Azizan said



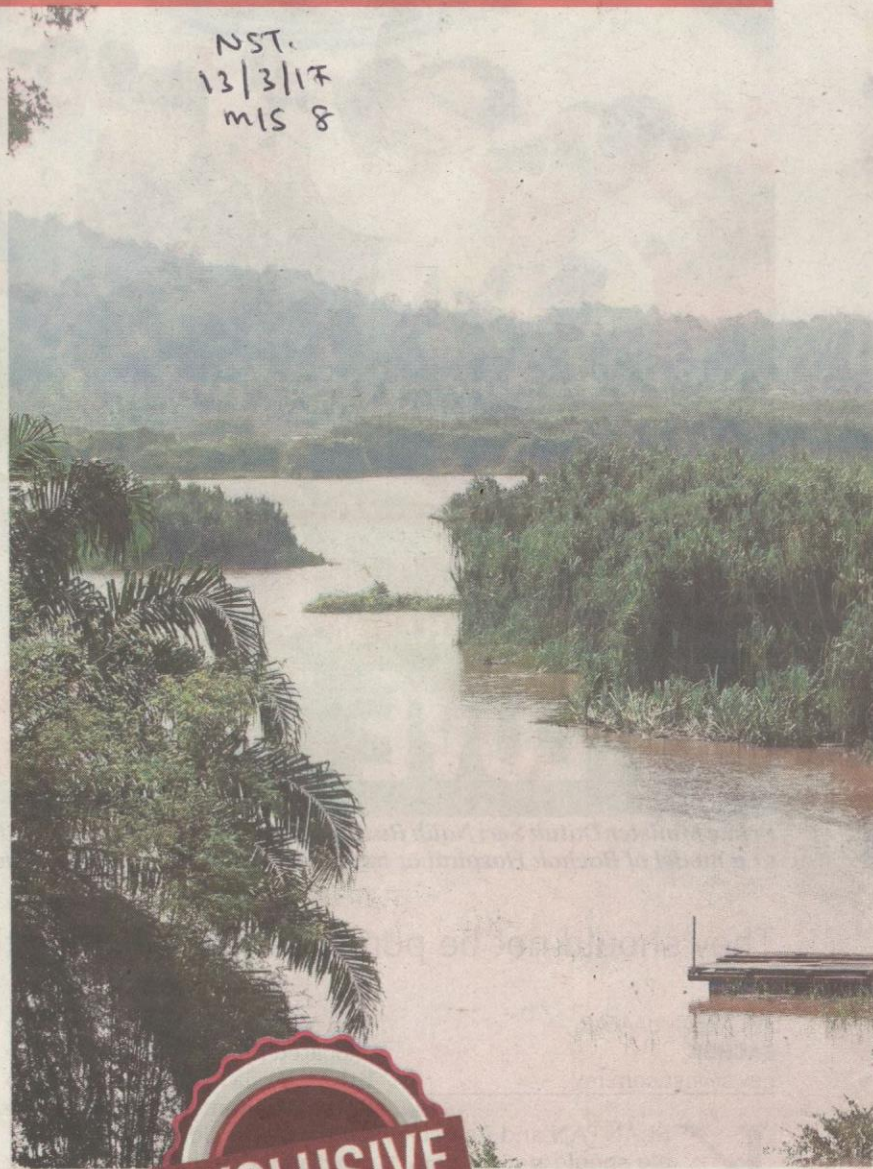
daily chores. Visitors can go for boat rides and visit the nearby Orang Asli settlements.

"Everyone is committed to reviving the lake, and we hope those involved in mining and farming activities will also cooperate."

Azizan, who has 40 employees at his resort, said tourist arrivals this year appeared promising, especially with the tie-ups with tour agencies in conjunction with the Visit Pahang Year 2017.

"Negative media reports on the lake over the past few years have been damaging and visitors chose to stay away," he said, adding that a new National Service training camp would be opened in the vicinity in September.

In an effort to rehabilitate the lake, lotus flowers had been replanted by the Forest Research



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zan Ibrahim said the water level during the floods was about 5m above the normal level, and this caused the lotus plants to be submerged.

Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar

there were some setbacks but the situation was not as serious as portrayed by

Mohd Azizan Ibrahim

the media reports.

“The Orang Asli community still casts their fishing nets, bathe in the lake and use the water for

“The plants were replanted when they were destroyed by massive floods. Then, the floods struck again recently. There is no

Institute of Malaysia and the State Forestry Department since 2015, said a resort employee, who declined to be named.

more the teh tarik-coloured water and we expect the quality to improve in the next few weeks,” he said.

On the logging and mining activities, he said they were not rampant, but the authorities must monitor them.

“The state Forestry Department regularly uses drones to check on illegal logging activities near the lake, but mining activities should be stopped once their permits expire,” he said, adding that the natural resources and environment minister should visit the lake to see what was happening on the ground.

He said the recent news reports that likened Tasik Chini to a “dead lake” had caught the attention of various quarters, prompting a meeting at the resort on March 4, attended by the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry’s secretary-general and heads of department.

“If the problem is genuine, all must work together to find a long-term solution,” he said.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, in a statement recently, said only two iron ore mines, approved by the state government in 2010, were operating in Tasik Chini and that

there were no logging activities near the lake.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, during a visit to the lake in October last year, reaffirmed the government’s commitment to conserving and preserving the coun-



A man fishing in Tasik Chini.

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Tasik Chini's ecosystem is claimed to be in a critical condition due to unregulated agriculture, logging and mining. PIX BY MUHAMMAD ASYRAF SAWAL

Where have the lotuses, fish gone?

PEKAN: Tasik Chini was once a haven for anglers, and lotus plants grew in abundance, according to Awang Alok, who was born and raised at Kampung Gumum here.

All that changed when a dam was built in 1994 along with mining, logging and farming activities in the vicinity of the lake.

Of late, efforts had been taken to revive the lake, with reforestation measures and stricter controls over activities in the area, but the 76-year-old Orang Asli community leader said they needed to be stepped up.

"When I was young, the lake was teeming with *ikan belida* (grey featherback), *arowana* and *jelawat* (hoven's carp), while the surroundings had *keranji* fruit trees. Nowadays, there are the common *ikan seluang*, *kelabau* and *lais*, which we (Orang Asli) catch using fishing nets.

"The Orang Asli community here is renowned as rattan collectors but, now, youths tap rubber and do odd-jobs to earn a



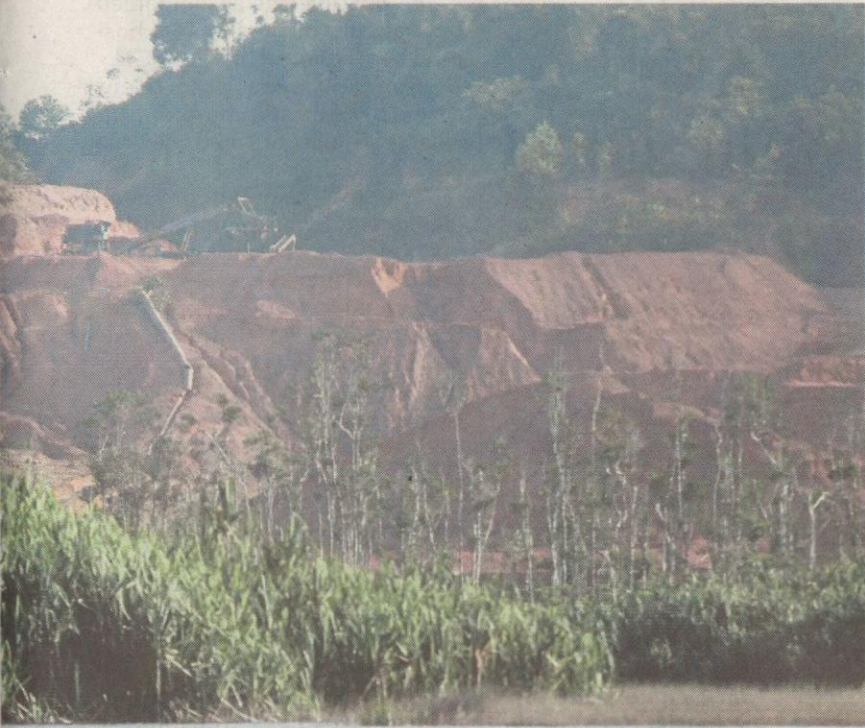
Uncontrolled logging, mining and farming near Tasik Chini must be checked.

time when the entire lake was filled with pink lotus flowers and boats had to manoeuvre around the plants when they toured the lake.

"Those were the best years for the lake. In the past, researchers from abroad would come and stay near the lake for

cerns about the environmental destruction at Tasik Chini, saying uncontrolled logging, mining and farming activities were ruining the ecosystem.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Tasik Chini Research Centre director Datuk Seri Dr Mushrifah Idris was



Land being cleared near Tasik Chini.

try's second largest natural lake. Tasik Chini, recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in May 2009 as the first biosphere reserve in the country, has been

making headlines for the wrong reasons after its ecosystem was claimed to be in a critical and dire situation due to unregulated agriculture, logging and mining activities.

ber and do odd jobs to earn a living. "Over the years, parts of the forest near the lake have been cleared, forcing us to go deeper into the jungle to search for resources, including fruits," he said at his house recently. Awang, who is the Kampung Gumum Orang Asli village headman, said the construction of a dam at the point where Sungai Chini entered Sungai Pahang to ensure the lake did not run dry, had also contributed to the lake's decline.

"During the monsoon season, water from Sungai Pahang will flow into the lake, causing it to become murky. Sadly, it also kills the lotus plants, which take months to recover," he said, adding that the construction of the dam had resulted in the roots of trees along Sungai Chini to remain underwater for weeks during the floods.

The father of 11 said there was a

near the lake for months. They would regularly drop by at the Orang Asli settlements, but these days, I hardly see anyone.

"Since logging and farming activities were carried out on the hills near the lake, during rainy weather, the top soil will be pushed into the water and increase the sediment deposited into the lake.

"Although it may not be serious, things could get out of hand if nothing is done soon."

Awang said the volume of water from Sungai Pahang that flowed into the lake during the monsoon season was high and the current was strong. Although it promised fishermen a good catch, he said, many chose not to go to the lake as they feared for their safety.

Many quarters have raised con-



Awang Alok

Malayalam language was quoted in a report as saying that the soil erosion caused by the activities could lead to the lake becoming shallow.

Awang said the lake had been under the spotlight for the wrong reasons for a long time and he hoped the joint efforts led by UKM would help turn the place in-

to a popular tourist destination it once enjoyed.

"Several agencies are working hard to ensure the lake's survival and I hope those carrying out logging, mining and farming activities would be more responsible."

Checks at the lake vicinity recently showed logging and mining activities ongoing and the state Forestry Department involved in replanting in parts of the forest.

By T.N. Alagesh



Efforts are under way to turn Tasik Chini into a popular tourist destination again.