

Kampong Ayer gets cleaner



The Kianggeh jetty in the capital, which used to be littered with rubbish, is looking clean and free of trash. Picture: BT/Quratul-Ain Bandial

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BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

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A FIVE-YEAR project to clean up the Kampong Ayer and the Brunei River launched by the Department of Environment, Parks and Recreation (Jastre) has started yielding desired results as Kg Ayer residents have joined the campaign wholeheartedly.

The success of the clean up project, which began in 2006 and will be completed in 2012, can be attributed to the cooperation extended by the Kg Ayer residents who feel that it's the responsibility of every Bruneian to keep this national heritage clean.

Although areas near the Bandar jetty are free from rubbish and plastic bags that were usually seen littering the banks of the river, the persisting problem is maintaining the level of cleanliness.

A ticket seller at the Bandar jetty, who only wished to be known as Siti, said that the authorities had conducted a big clean-up operation in the days leading up to the Asean Tourism Forum in January.

"Boats were deployed with large nets that were able to scoop up all the floating rubbish in the river from near the Tamoi Mosque up to villages near Subok. Workers were also on hand to pick up the rubbish that gets washed up on to the river banks. It's a huge improvement so far," she said.

However, Siti said: "Sometimes people waiting for the boats at the jetty just carelessly toss their trash into the river, most of them are kids actually. Obviously they haven't been taught that it's very irresponsible behaviour."

A 71-year-old resident of Kg Ayer, Hj Salleh Hj Mohd Akram, said that most of the rubbish seen floating along the river is not the fault of Kg Ayer residents, but has been discarded by people living far inland.

Hj Salleh said that the garbage flows downriver towards the open sea but then gets stuck once it reaches the river bends and the marshy areas near Kg Ayer.

"We tried to install a fence at the narrowest part of the river to stop rubbish from floating any farther into the mukim, but as you can see, it remains trapped along the fence, stinking up the entire place. Although the water is shallow, it's very hard to collect the rubbish on foot because the ground is boggy, similar to the mangroves, and there is sharp wood sticking out of the mud," he said.

When asked if collecting rubbish via boats would be more effective, Hj Salleh replied that he doesn't have the equipment to collect large amounts of trash.

In 2006, Jastre took over the responsibility of managing the collection and disposal of waste in Kg Ayer. According to previous reports, Jastre introduced free daily rubbish collection to several villages along the Brunei River, in addition to installing more garbage disposal bins at the water village.

However, Erdie Issamuddin, a water taxi operator from Kg Sg Bunga, said that a change in mindset is what's needed to stop trash from accumulating in the Brunei River.

"If they are really interested in making the rivers clean, they need to educate villagers on how to dispose off the rubbish properly. You can't just put the bins there and expect everything to change. You have to talk to them one-on-one and explain to them why this is important," he said.

Erdie added that the focus of the cleanliness campaign should extend beyond the residents of the water village to all Bruneians in the country. "We aren't the only ones responsible for dumping. The authorities should also educate the inland people not to dump their rubbish in the water because it affects us further down the river."

Hj Apong, a fisherman who lives in Mukim Saba, said he was happy that the government was finally taking steps to restore the Brunei River to its natural glory which would increase its economic viability.

"I have been fishing for over 30 years and the catch is just not as good as it used to be. It has become smaller and smaller and it's harder to make a living. It's frustrating because I've had to look for other ways to supplement my income. I don't want any other job because my father and grandfather were both fishermen in this village," he said.

He added, "But these campaigns need to be prolonged and persistent otherwise the rubbish problem will just resurface after a while."

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