



The river cleaning unit from The Ocean Cleanup docked near the Klang Municipal Council. PIC BY SADDAM YUSOFF

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

# SUNGAI KLANG GIVEN NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Development plan to revive river set to be a game changer for Selangor

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**F**OR decades, Sungai Klang's existence and great potential have been overlooked. It was perceived as a mere river that flows from Ampang up to the river mouth in Port Klang, spanning 120km.

After decades of neglect, Sungai Klang eventually earned a negative perception as it became an illegal dumping ground, accumulating tonnes of rubbish and waste.

That perception is set to change in the next few months and years to come, as Selangor has set its sights on Klang's section of the river; it wants to turn it into one of the state's new key economic and tourism sectors.

Selangor's Menteri Besar Incorporated's (MBI) subsidiary, Landasan Lumayan Sdn Bhd (LLSB), has a comprehensive development plan focused on river cleaning, rehabilitation and injecting economic and tourism activities along Sungai Klang.

LLSB managing director Syaiful Azmen Nordin said plans were afoot to bring Sungai Klang back to its glory days through development in phases under Selangor Maritime Gateway.

Syaiful said long ago, Sungai Klang was the main transportation hub for the state, linking Klang and Kuala Lumpur. It took about two days to get from one point to the other. The principal commodity that was transported on the river then was tin, but other commercial activities were also carried out.

After Aug 31, 1957, Selangor underwent industrialisation and saw the rise of a new satellite town called Petaling Jaya, and subsequently, sister towns such as Shah Alam and Subang Jaya.

Amid these developments, Sungai Klang was neglected and eventually, after the 1980s and 1990s, became a dumping ground for illegal settlements that dotted

the riverbanks. The situation worsened with the discharge of effluents from industrial factories.

A wake-up call for the Selangor government and its agencies came in the form of a major flood in 1998.

Seeing Batu Tiga in Shah Alam submerged opened up the eyes of the authorities, making them realise it was high time a concerted effort was made to tackle the abundance of rubbish and waste in the river.

"Sungai Klang remains an invaluable resource for the state. Something had to be done because the river had been neglected for so long.

"In 2015, a team from MBI, including LLSB chairman Raja Shahreen Raja Othman and I, visited the river and was shocked to find that one could literally walk on the water due to the immense volume of waste floating on it.

"We presented the dire situation to the then menteri besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, the state

secretary and the state Economic Planning Unit that the rubbish menace must end... we needed to tackle the most basic issue first, which was to get rid of the rubbish and we were given an allocation to conduct river-cleaning activities," Syaiful told the *New Straits Times* recently.

The clean-up started in 2016. Waste flowing from Sungai Klang tributaries were tracked and seven log booms were installed, on top of conducting waste collection and removal, as well as eliminating illegal dumping along the riverbanks.

Syaiful described cleaning Sungai Klang, spanning 56km from the boundary near Midvalley Megamall to the river mouth in Port Klang, covering four municipal and city councils, namely Petaling Jaya City Council, Shah Alam City Council, Klang Municipal Council and Subang Jaya Municipal Council, as a huge undertaking.

Yet they persevered to send the message that making the river

clean again was not an impossible dream.

He said in the last four years, over 50,000 metric tonnes of waste has been removed.

"Most people are wondering, how much is that really? Well 50,000 metric tonnes is the equivalent weight of 2,500 RapidKL buses. So imagine now — there were 2,500 buses sitting in our river, clogging it up, rotting and killing everything in it. There are many non-governmental organisations that play their part by raising awareness and organising weekly gotong-royong.

"This, together with Selangor's policies on plastic and styrofoam use and enforcement activities, has made a difference, as we are starting to see a lower monthly quantity of waste extracted from Sungai Klang since the start of this year," said Syaiful.

He added that the Sungai Klang Water Quality Index had been classified as Class 3 (moderately good) from Class 5 (contaminated). The aim is to hit Class 2, where the water is suitable for body contact and ideal for recreational activities.

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Syaiful Azmen Nordin