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Thousands of tonnes of waste still not cleared at illegal site

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BUKIT MERTAJAM: A year after truckloads of illegally dumped waste was discovered in marshland here, everything now looks green but there's more to it than meets the eye.

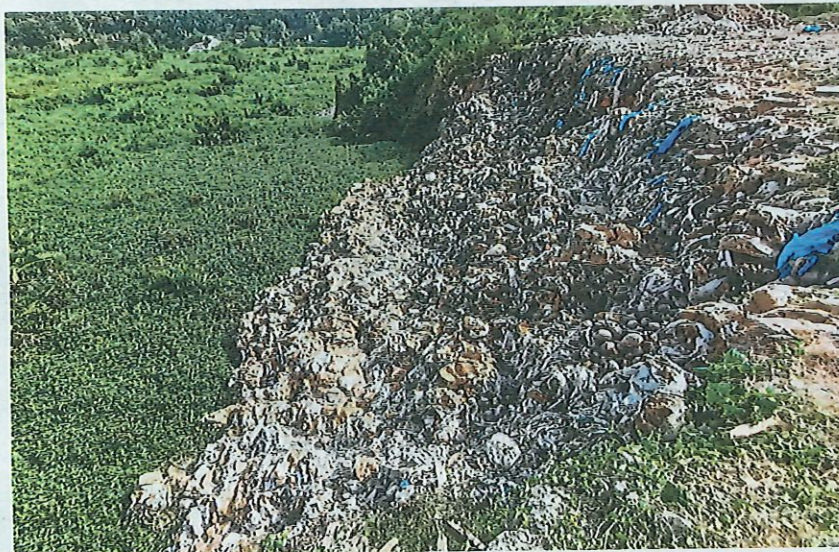
The thousands of tonnes of plastic waste, discarded furniture, construction debris and food waste have been left there for so long that creeper vines and overgrowth now cover them.

At the edge of the marsh, thousands of plastic sacks containing powdery waste can still be seen baking under the sun while mounds of shredded plastic sheets have been reduced to smaller piles scattered everywhere over the year.

Big blocks of imported plastic waste, stacked high, have begun to be covered with vegetation.

Recent checks by *The Star* showed that the illegal factory producing wood pallets was still there. Though nobody was seen, the factory doors were open and the humming of machinery or ventilation fans was audible on the land in Bukit Teh, at the fringe of the eastern Penang-Kedah border.

Last March, a team from *The Star* stumbled on the 6.5ha illegal dumpsite while trailing Department of Environment (DOE) enforcers to check on illegally dumped chemicals in a nearby oil



Human footprint: Bags of unknown powdery substance tumbling into marshland at the illegal dumpsite in Bukit Teh near Machang Bubok in Bukit Mertajam.

palm plantation.

After the dumping activities were highlighted, Seberang Prai City Council (MBSP) enforcers swooped down on the landowner but it took almost a month to put a stop to the dumping.

MBSP mayor Datuk Rozali Mohamad said recently that the factory had not received any licence from the council and legal action had been taken against it.

"The factory pleaded guilty in court and was fined RM2,000

under the MBSP Licence Payment By-Law. We also issued five compounds for its illegal business operation.

"Its application for a licence was rejected because the factory owner has not re-zoned the land from agri-

culture to industrial.

"It is supposed to demolish the building. The court has also ordered the landowner to clear the dumped waste," said Rozali.

MBSP, he added, was in the process of filing three more legal suits against the factory for illegal structure erection, land development without planning permission and conducting a business without valid licence.

Ten notices have been issued to date for various offences committed at the dumpsite and five court cases are ongoing.

"Scheduled waste will need to be disposed of in accordance with the DOE's procedures while domestic waste needs to be disposed of at the Pulau Burung landfill.

"The landowner will need to bear all the expenses incurred during the waste disposal," he said.

MBSP is pursuing another case under Section 82 (10) of the Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171) for failure to comply with a court order to have the land cleared within a stipulated time.

"If convicted, the landowner can be fined up to RM100 daily for the duration since the non-compliance with the court order," he said.

The illegal dumpsite is about nine lots of land, about the size of six football fields.

In March last year, *The Star* exposed the illegal dumpsite in a remote area with an entrance in the midst of an oil palm estate.