

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), *arwana* 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 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



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 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-

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 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



Awang Alok



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