

Century-old canal now a dumpsite

ALOR STAR: It was the lifeline for padi fields in Kedah, but Terusan Wan Mat Saman is now reduced to being a mere drain and a dumping ground for household refuse.

The 125-year-old irrigation canal, built by Kedah's first prime minister Wan Muhammad Saman Wan Ismail, is becoming an eyesore with many sections along the 35km waterway turning into huge rubbish dumps.

Kedah historian Datuk Dr Wan Shamsuddin Yusof is urging the state government and the federal authorities to clean up the waterway and to make it a national heritage.

He said there were calls by agencies, non-governmental organisations and villagers to conserve the structure as a national heritage in the 1990s, but they fell on deaf ears.

"There was a hype then to conserve Terusan Wan Mat Saman but, now, the canal is fast becoming an eyesore as it has turned into a huge rubbish bin by irresponsible villagers and traders.

"I still remember its water was crystal clear and used by many for domestic purpose, including for bathing, and boats used the canal to transport goods."

However, he said, despite regular clean-up by the local authority, the waterway remained filthy and no serious efforts were taken to restore the waterway to its original state.

"There was a proposal to set up a mini-museum for the canal, but it has yet to materialise.

"I hope the Information, Communication and Culture Ministry will step in so that Wan Muhammad Saman's iconic structure and historical significance would not be forgotten by future generations."

Wan Muhammad Saman built the canal after he was inspired by Thailand's agriculture and transportation development during his visit to the country with Sultan of Kedah Sultan Ahmad Tajudin Mukarram Shah in 1865.

The waterway ceased to function as an irrigation canal after the Muda Irrigation Scheme was implemented by Muda Agricultural Development Authority in 1970.



The stretch of the Wan Mat Saman canal along the Sultan Abdul Halim Highway near Tandop, Alor Star, is filled with rubbish. — NST picture by Syaharim Abidin