

Making river fit for splashing in

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES: Bid to make Sarawak's Sungai Bintangor as clean as it once was

DENNIS WONG

KUCHING

news@nst.com.my

AS a teenager, he used to swim in Sungai Bintangor, catching crabs and mudskippers.

Housing and Tourism Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Openg recalled that "back then, the river was our playground."

"We used to swing from the trees and dive into the river."

However, urbanisation had caused the quality of the river to deteriorate over the years, he said, adding that these days, it was not advisable to splash around in the river that used to offer much fun to many.

Yesterday, Johari launched a river cleanliness campaign, called "My Beautiful Sungai Bintangor" at Kampung Masjid, where he grew up.

"I grew up here and used to pretend that I was 'Tarzan', swinging myself into the river from this very spot," he said at the launch.

The programme was to educate the villagers about the importance of rivers to society, apart from its role in drainage and irrigation.

"It is more than that. Many people know about the waterfront expansion.

"We want this village to be part of the expansion.

"Therefore, they, too, must be

responsible for the quality of the river."

Annually, Kuching North City Hall spends more than RM500,000 on river cleaning and maintenance.

"The river provides us with water, transportation, income and recreational opportunities.

"No matter how developed we are, we still rely on it."

Johari added that since the relocation of the Satok Market to Kubah Ria, the water quality in Sungai Bintangor had improved.

Johari, together with Petra Jaya member of parliament Datuk Fadillah Yusof and Kuching North Mayor Datuk Abang Wahap Abang Julai, as well as villagers and school children, threw mud balls into the river at the launch.

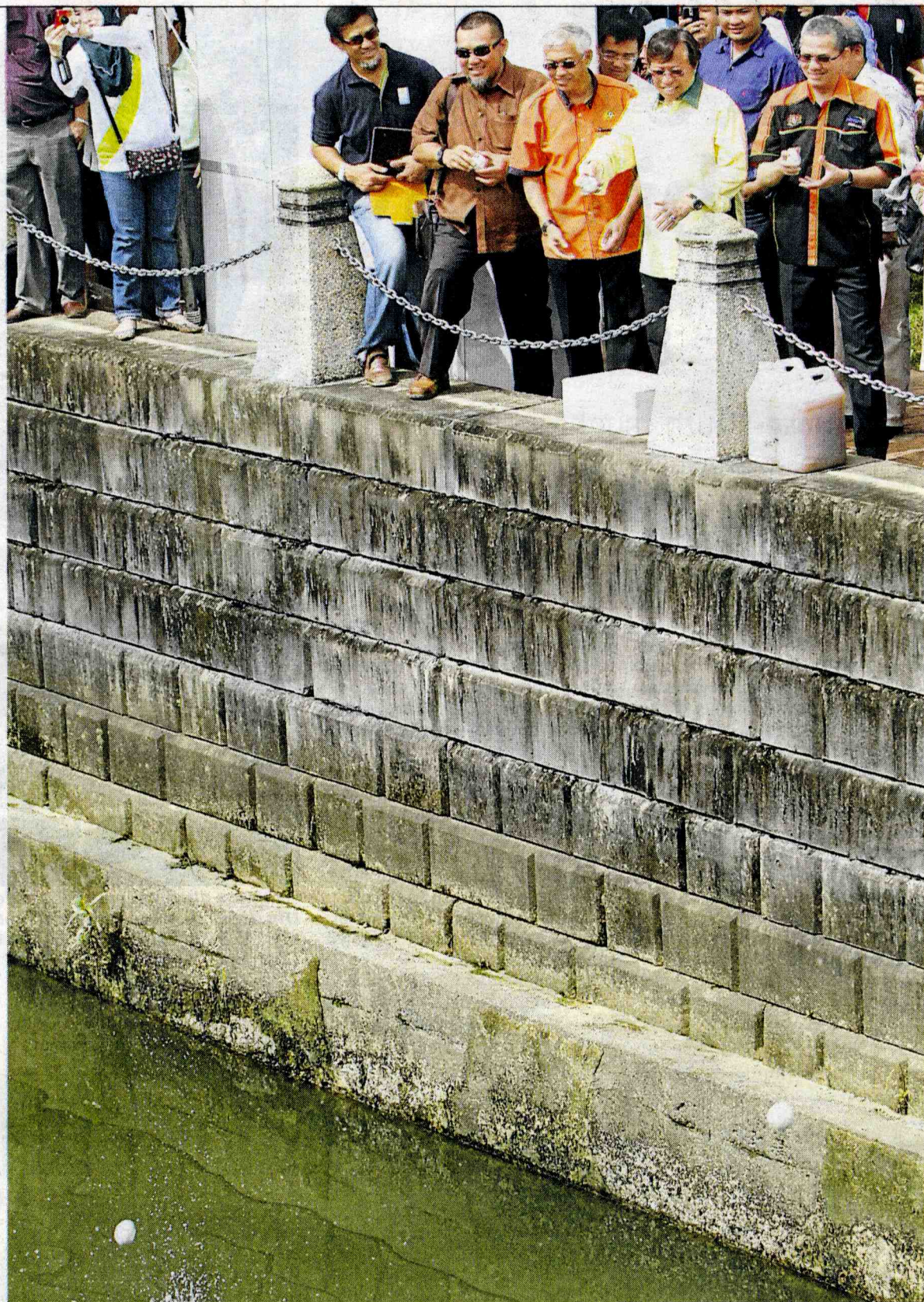
The balls were made of clay, molasses, lactic acid, phototropic bacteria, yeast and antinomycetes.

They will dissolve gradually in the river, and in the process, the microorganisms in them will eradicate the bad bacteria in the water.

Wahap said city hall needed the community's participation to ensure the city's cleanliness.

"It is our job to manage the city and keep it clean.

"If the community keeps ignoring the part they play in maintaining the level of cleanliness, our efforts will not bring about any improvement."



Datuk Amar Abang Johari Openg (second from right), flanked by **Datuk Fadillah Yusof** (right) and **Datuk Abang Abdul Wahap Abang Julai**, throwing mud balls into Sungai Bintangor at the launch of the river cleanliness campaign yesterday. Pic by Mas Adib Saie