

Major pollution at beach

BATU FERRINGHI

MARRED: Huge patch of black water causes unease among holidaymakers

**PREDEEP NAMBIAR
AND BALVIN KAUR**

GEORGE TOWN
news@nst.com.my

BARELY a month after the launch of Visit Malaysia Year, erosion has marred the beach at Batu Ferringhi.

Compounding the problem is a patch of black water, about the size of a football field, near the resort of the erosion in the tourist belt.

Acting on complaints from tourists, who had flocked to the resorts for the Chinese New Year holidays, the *New Straits Times* conducted checks and found beach erosion near Bayview Beach Resort was inching its way closer to the hotel's grounds.

Previously, the public beach fronting the sea was about 50m wide, but erosion has left the resort with no more than a sandy patch.

If not for some huge trees lining the beach front, the remaining beachfront would have collapsed and erosion would have made its way into the hotel grounds.

The authorities were at odds over the cause of the erosion but checks showed a nearby river, which had snaked its way to the beachfront, could be one of the culprits.

Besides eating its way along the sandy beach, stretching for about 100m, Sungai Batu Ferringhi was also discharging black water into the sea near the resort.

Mo Pearce, 74, said she was appalled at the condition of the



Tourists walking along the eroded beach at Batu Ferringhi. Pic by Ramdzan Masiam

beach. The Briton said she noticed the erosion five days ago.

"I am very disappointed to see the beach has eroded dangerously. This is not my first visit to Penang and the resort but from what I am seeing, it shows the beach has never been cared for.

"I come to Penang for your lovely beaches but now I am totally disgusted at the sheer neglect by the authorities."

Baharudin Ismail said he was shocked to find the river spewing black effluents into the sea. He said the river water was murky when he and his family picnicked near the resort on Saturday.

Yesterday, he took a dip in the sea and found a thick black patch floating towards him.

"I quickly got out of the water and found the black patch had originated from the river. I don't know what it was but I am not staying back to find out."

Checks showed the black patch was not an oil slick and had no foul odour. Its texture was also not gritty, ruling out any suspended ma-

terial like human faeces.

However, K. Sam, 61, who runs watersports services, said he detected a foul smell coming from the river early yesterday.

"The smell was gone by midday but the colour remained black."

Tanjung Bungah assemblyman Teh Yee Cheu did not rule out dumping of food waste by nearby roadside eateries as the cause of the river water turning black. He also did not rule out leakage from a nearby sewage treatment plant.

Penang Malaysia Nature Society acting chairman D. Kanda Kumar said erosion along the beach in Batu Ferringhi was common but had become more serious because of reclamation works, both legal and illegal, in nearby Tanjung Bungah.

He said the reclamation had forced sea waves to divert its direction towards the northern part of the island, with Batu Ferringhi bearing the full brunt.

State Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh expressed shock when contacted by the NST.

"This is a very serious matter and I will send the relevant officers to investigate the matter."

A Penang Island Municipal Council officer said river discharge was the purview of the Drainage and Irrigation Department.

"The council is in charge of beach cleaning, especially clearing rubbish. For oil spills, it is the Marine Department's jurisdiction."

He said he would refer the matter to the council's Licensing Department to investigate if nearby eateries had polluted the river.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel said he would despatch Department of Environment officers to investigate the source of the pollution and erosion.

"These irresponsible actions will turn away tourists from Batu Ferringhi. We want to know who is behind it." **Additional reporting by Anis Nabila Md Wazilah**

Page 1 pic: The black waters at Batu Ferringhi beach turn away many visitors.