

# Greater flood risk if Sungai Benus is clogged

**BENTONG:** For Janda Baik villagers, Sungai Benus and its tributaries will determine its future survival.

It is said that the village got its name from an incident involving a kindhearted Orang Asli divorcee, who reunited with her husband on Pulau Santap, a small island in the middle of the river.

Chalet operator and tourist guide Jeffrey Jais, 50, said seven streams flowed into Sungai Benus, which flowed into the mouth of a cave known as Kepala Gua.

"Pollution, garbage and debris will eventually be swept into the river and clog Kepala Gua.

"If these problems are left unchecked, Janda Baik may face more serious floods in the future."

The village has experienced several floods in recent years, including one last week, when a fish pond at a farm in Kampung Sum-Sum burst its banks and triggered a mudslide that affected the main road.

"Streams in Janda Baik have peculiar characteristics.

"Many of them have smaller volumes downstream, as the water is extracted by various parties before it reaches Sungai Benus."

Some resort and *maahad tahfiz* operators have built permanent infrastructures on the riverbanks, which are supposed to be left untouched as they act as buffer zones.

Since his chalet is located near the jungle track to the Tampit Waterfall, Jeffrey said he had met several people who had surveyed the forest reserve for the construction of towers for a power grid from Perak to Negri Sembilan.

"We are afraid that the project will affect the Tampit waterfall, which is among the few attractions in Janda Baik that are still well-preserved."

Jeffrey said the plan to construct the towers near Kuala Gua was embroiled in controversy when some villagers claimed that the contractor had encroached beyond the permitted area to harvest timber such as *meranti merah* and *chengal*.

Pahang Forestry Department director Datuk Mohd Paiz Kamaruzaman said the department had yet to



**Datuk Mohd Paiz Kamaruzaman says only 2ha of forest reserve in Janda Baik has been cleared by Orang Asli**

issue a licence to allow the contractor to clear the path in the Lentang forest reserve, upstream of the Tampit Waterfall.

"The department must receive feedback from other agencies before we can decide on the matter," he said yesterday.

Paiz said there were no reports about the contractor violating the law or stealing timber. He said his officers were monitoring the project.

He refuted claims that a vast area of forest reserve in Janda Baik had been encroached on in recent months, as investigations found that only 2ha had been cleared by the Orang Asli recently.

"We will take action and rehabilitate the affected area," he said, adding that other encroached areas would also be replanted with timber saplings.

Last year, he said the centralised enforcement team, which was led by the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, had carried out four massive operations in Janda Baik, and reclaimed 40ha of forest reserves that had been encroached on.

"Although none of the areas has been reoccupied by the culprits, the department will continue to monitor them and may organise a joint operation soon."