

# Fewer Taman Negara visitors

## SHALLOW WATERS:

Sungai Tembeling tourist boat operators hit hard by dry spell

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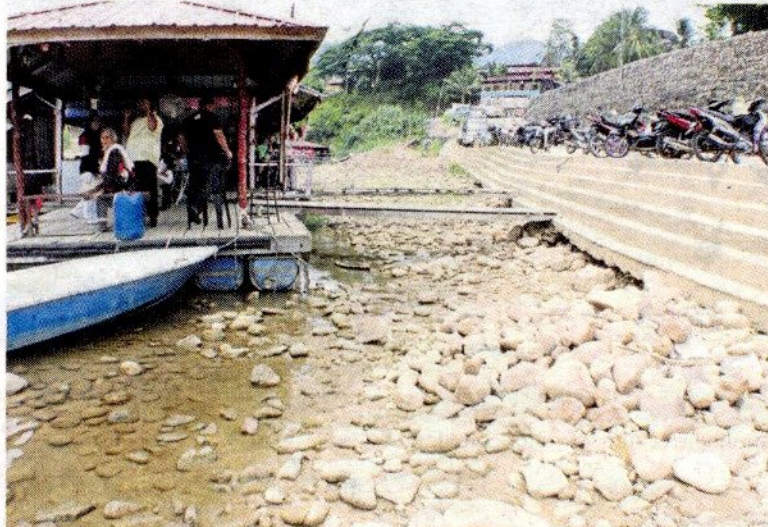
**T**HE current hot and dry spell has hit tourist boat operators in Sungai Tembeling here as there has been a drop in the number of passengers travelling to Taman Negara.

The river's shallow water level has disrupted boat services, causing the journey upstream to take a longer time.

Some boatmen are forced to pull their boats across the river.

Some said rapids along the river made travelling dangerous, especially for passengers like children, the elderly and pregnant women.

Boat operator Jefri Ahmad Shahbudin said the water level at Kuala Tahan was not bad last month. However, since there had been no rain, the situation had worsened, resulting



*The floating restaurant at the Taman Negara jetty is operating on the sandbank due to Sungai Tembeling's shallow water level. Pic by Amir Hamzah Nordin*

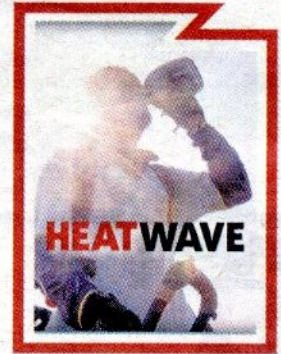
in tourists staying away.

The 27-year-old said most parts of the river used to be more than 3m deep, but now, some parts were only knee-deep and the sandbanks could be seen.

"A 45-minute journey upstream to the nearest village (Kampung Pagi) now takes almost two hours. At certain stretches, boatmen have to get off their boats and pull them through the shallow water.

"Sometimes, the boat propellers get damaged when they hit rocks and this results in delays. The heat-wave makes our job difficult and we pity passengers who have to sit for long hours in our boats."

Another boatman, Zainurin Sulaiman, 49, said although visitors continued to come to Taman Negara, many were reluctant to use the passenger boat services because of the hot weather and shallow waters.



"Even the famous floating restaurant at the Taman Negara jetty is now operating on the sandbank. I hope the water will not dry up or else tourists might cancel their trips," he said, hoping the rainy season would arrive soon.

A tourist guide, who wanted to remain anonymous, said the boat ride along Sungai Tembeling was the main attraction for visitors to Taman Negara as they would be able to visit the Orang Asli settlement, Kelah sanctuary and other attractions.

"The shallow water is affecting tourism and water-based activities. We have experienced similar situations in the past, but it is worse this year," he said, adding that the water was becoming shallower day by day.