

SURAT KEPADA PENGARANG

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TARIKH.....

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Timber truck terror at Bintulu-Bakun road

As a Sarawakian, reading about the RM500bil allocated to upgrade the Pan Borneo highway was good news.

For many of us, every major festival or school holiday would be marked by the five to 12 hours in a car or a bus, on a narrow, crumbling road with more patches than a heirloom quilt.

I would also like to thank the Government and the Public Works Department (JKR) for the recent upgrading works on the Bintulu-Bakun road that serves the Bakun, Sungai Asap and Belaga towns.

When I started working in Sungai Asap, which is a resettlement for villages displaced by the Bakun dam construction, the 125km turnoff from the Bintulu-Miri highway was unrecognisable as a sealed road.

The topmost layer of tar had peeled off, with the underlying loose rubble of large rocks forming ditches that were too deep for smaller cars.

Motorists had to second guess and drive on the wrong side of the road, or off-road altogether, which was very dangerous given that the road was narrow and winding.

There have been countless accidents and fatalities, one even involving an emergency medical services vehicle in June this year.

Some have found that driving on the unsealed logging roads that bypassed this road was much more preferable than this bone-jarring experience, despite the latter being steep and slippery.

Day and night, huge timber trucks would traverse the main road. These trucks carried logs that jut out from the back of the truck, and did not use rear-lights at night.

It was clear that these heavily-laden trucks were the main culprits in destroying the Bintulu-Bakun road, which had been patched and repaired many times to no avail.

A few months ago, everyone was happy to see the start of extensive road repair works on this road, which, in the hopeful words of one of my colleagues, 'macam ada SOP sikit'.

Now, a harrowing three-hour journey has been slashed to a comfortable one of less than two hours. Even so, the timber trucks are still plying the road, and even before the completion of the repair works, there are cracks and potholes in the newly tarred sections.

If the trucks would stick to their designated logging roads, the heart-breaking waste of cost and effort in finally building a proper road for the people can be avoided.

As it is, the Bintulu-Bakun road is fast becoming another example of attempting damage control without addressing the root cause.

CC TING
Sungai Asap, Sarawak