An underutilised structure along the River of Life path in Brickfields.

Brickfields residents ready to safeguard River of Life assets

By BAVANI M
bavanim@thestar.com.my

BRICKFIELDS stakeholders have expressed their willingness to help manage River of Life (ROL) assets in their area.

This follows Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Federal Territories, Dr Zaliha Mustafa proposal to engage local communities in maintaining the project's assets.

"We're ready to step up and play our part to address issues of neglect and vandalism of ROL assets and infrastructure," said Rukun Tetangga (RT) chairman SKK Naidu.

"The Brickfields community, through the RT and Local Agenda 21 (LA21) Safe City KL are more than willing to volunteer time and effort to take care of ROL assets in our neighbourhood."

Naidu said the community's proximity to these assets allowed them to act as custodians.

"Since we live nearby and residents pass by the ROL structures when using the jogging paths daily for exercise, we can become the eyes and ears of Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL).

"I have sent many letters to DBKL in the past, proposing a collaborative effort.

"We even suggested that a representative living near these assets could check for any vandalism or encroachment," he added.

In an interview with *StarMetro* for Federal Territories Day, Dr Zaliha expressed her support for engaging local communities, particularly in areas like Brickfields, where ROL assets are located.

"I've heard that nearby communities are eager to volunteer and manage these assets.

"It's a fantastic idea to let them take on this responsibility.

"We will work with these communities and possibly allocate some funding for their efforts," she said.

Community engagement, she added, was critical in building relationships and ensuring long-term care for these assets.

The ROL project comprises 11 precincts, spanning from Taman Tasik Titiwangsa in the north to Mid Valley Megamall in the south.

It includes a 10.7km stretch along the Klang and Gombak rivers, developed to support recreational activities such as walking, jogging, cycling and picnicking.

The Brickfields section is Precinct 11, located at the project's southern end.

Brickfields resident Dr Christopher Nicholas expressed support for the initiative but emphasised the need for transparency.

"I'm more than willing to work with DBKL and other stakeholders, but transparency is key," he said.

In 2023, *StarMetro* reported that millions of ringgit in assets from the ROL beautification project in Brickfields were underutilised and in a state of disrepair.

At least four structures and two public toilets along a 3km footpath next to Sungai Klang, stretching from Central Market to Mid Valley Megamall, were found to be in poor condition.

These facilities are frequently used by vagrants and drug addicts for shelter at night.

These buildings have never been opened to the public and yet show clear signs of neglect and vandalism.

Last July, the Auditor-General's Report 2/2024 revealed that the ROL project was delayed and had not met key objectives, including improving river water quality to Class IIB, which is suitable for recreational activities.

The project, intended to transform the Klang and Gombak rivers into vibrant waterfronts, was hampered by poor planning, weak implementation, inadequate asset management and low public awareness of river care.
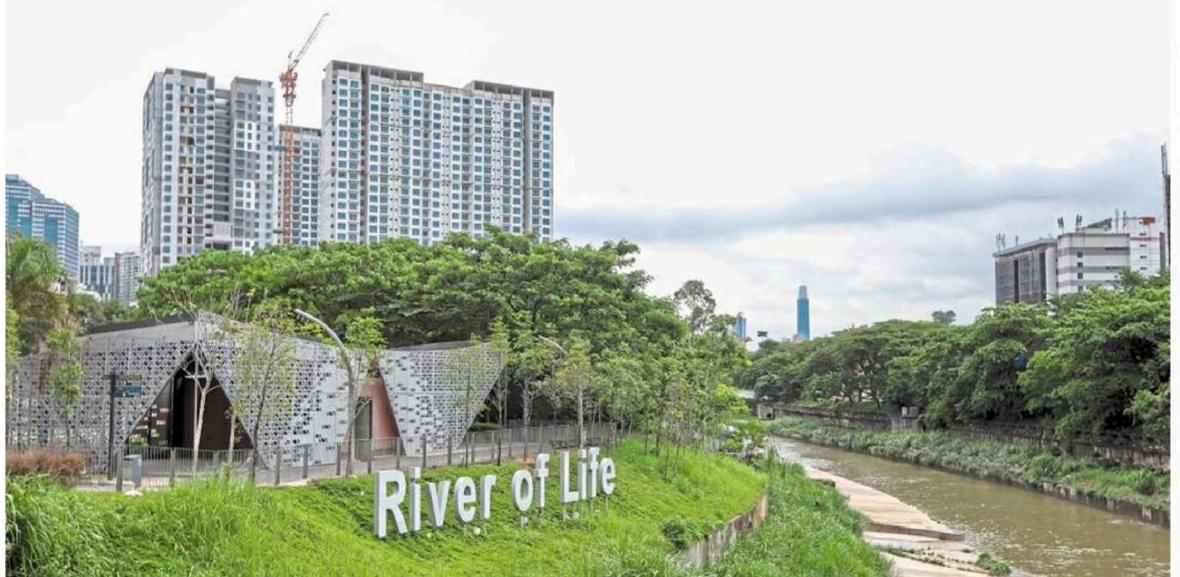
The report also cited the absence of a sustainable business model, which left the project dependent on government funding.

This reliance has resulted in inadequate maintenance and underutilisation of ROL assets.

Governance issues were also identified, including deficiencies in project planning, monitoring, design preparation, consultant appointments and execution.

Of the RM4.36bil allocated to ROL, RM3.3bil was for river cleaning and RM1.06bil for river beautification.

As of December last year, RM3.915bil had been spent on the project.

Some of the assets under the River of Life project have fallen into disrepair. — Filepic