

*“Singaporeans still must learn not to drop litter and trash on the ground, which washes into drains and the river...”*

— Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

# Singapore River clean-up is ‘never done’: PM Lee

Singaporeans should help by not littering, as trash gets washed into river by rain

SEOW BEI YI

Forty years after Singapore embarked on a clean-up of the Singapore River, the Prime Minister said that keeping the river clean is a relentless effort and that people should help by refraining from littering.

“The river clean-up is never done,” said Mr Lee Hsien Loong yesterday. “Singaporeans still must learn not to drop litter and trash on the ground, which washes into drains and the river, and has to be caught with booms along the way.”

He was speaking at a 60th anniversary event for Malay daily Berita Harian. The newspaper’s celebration includes a five-day exhibition by the Singapore River, honouring pioneers’ efforts in the clean-up.

The amount of litter in the 3.2km-long Singapore River has barely changed in the past five years, said PUB.

Its contractors, using vessels like flotsam removal craft, retrieve an estimated 200kg to 400kg of litter a day from the river, between Kim Seng Road Bridge and Esplanade Bridge.

“The amount of litter has not significantly changed from five years ago,” the national water agency told The Straits Times.

Besides leaves and twigs, litter collected includes plastic bags and plastic bottles.



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong being briefed on the water treatment process with Berita Harian editor Saat Abdul Rahman (in blue).

TNP PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

Litter around the Singapore River area — which include Clarke Quay, Boat Quay and Robertson Quay — is washed into drains by rain and finds its way into the river.

In his speech, PM Lee recalled the state of the Singapore River before 1977: “The water was black, notoriously smelly and toxic”.

A blind telephone operator who worked at his mother’s law firm always knew when to get off the bus because he could smell the river when the bus crossed it, said PM Lee.

It took much coordination, planning, and a “determination

and political will” to remove the pollution.

Over 10 years, Singapore dredged up the polluted riverbed and removed pig farms and other pollutive industries, he said. There was also a need to sewer up all premises in the catchment, relocate squatters to HDB flats, street hawkers to new hawker centres, and shipyards to Pasir Panjang, he added.

Dr Albert Winsemius, the chief economic adviser then, even had a bet with the river clean-up team that the river would not sustain life, recalled PM Lee.

“He recommended that we

turn the Singapore River into a sewage system by covering it up,” he said.

On what can be done today, chief executive of water solutions company Aquayana, Mr Hassan Ahmad, said there could be more platforms to show the impact of litter on water supply.

Mr Hassan added that there has to be education at all levels.

“As (former national water agency PUB chairman) Tan Gee Paw said, you don’t need a PhD to solve the issue, it’s more of willpower, to rally the people to solve it together,” he said.

byseow@sph.com.sg

## BH has ‘vital role’ in strengthening Singapore’s social fabric

While some newspapers around the world have “succumbed to the temptation to sensationalise news, use click-bait headlines and even publish unverified stories”, local dailies such as Berita Harian must always continue reporting accurately, responsibly and from a national perspective, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

“As Singapore’s only Malay daily, you play a vital role in influencing your readers and strengthening our multiracial and multi-religious social fabric,” he added.

He was speaking at an event at Swissotel Merchant Court Singapore to celebrate the newspaper’s 60th anniversary.

Mr Lee noted that Berita Harian, published by Singapore Press Holdings, “has kept (its) journalistic integrity and prudence” and must always do so.

“You have to keep up with your readers’ changing profiles and interests,” said Mr Lee.

“At the same time, you need to deal with the disruptions brought on by the digital age — competition from social media and confusion from fake news.”

Speaking in Malay, PM Lee noted that while the newspaper has refreshed its content and presentation to appeal to the younger generation, it has also stayed true to its founding objective: of being “a bridge to foster better understanding and relations between Malays and the members of the non-Malay community”. — SEOW BEI YI