

RM20bil needed for rehab of rivers

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A WHOPPING RM20bil will be needed to rehabilitate 17 extremely polluted rivers in the country.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said his ministry was considering using private funding initiatives (PFI) to raise the funds needed.

However, he said he had yet to receive any suitable PFI proposal.

"We have applied for an allocation from the Finance Ministry but I do not know if it will be approved," he said when winding up the debate on the Budget for his ministry at the committee stage.

Azmi said if an allocation is approved by the Government, it would be used for the more important rivers first based on a list of priorities.

He said 20 out of 100 rivers in the country had been categorised as extremely polluted.

Azmi also said 1,800km of the country's beaches had suffered from erosion and the Government needed RM300mil to overcome the problem.

"Unfortunately, the allocation we

received was insufficient but we will consider the suggestions from those who are concerned about the state of the beaches," he said.

Meanwhile, Deputy Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Osman said the ministry was studying the proposal to increase allocations for all Parliamentary constituencies next year.

He said the ministry was aware of the insufficient allocation for the social amenities programme.

He said the allocation for the programme in 2006 was RM12.56mil.

"For the 148 parliament constituencies in the rural areas, the allocation was RM10.29mil while another RM2.27mil were allocated to 39 parliament constituencies in suburban areas," he said while winding up the debate on the Budget for his ministry at the committee stage.

Earlier, he told the House that the Government aimed to reduce hardcore poverty in rural areas from 2.9% to 0%, and the poverty rate from 11.9% to 5.95% by 2010.