

Step up plans to save rivers

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THE goal of any campaign to rehabilitate rivers ("RIP: Rivers in peril" — NST, Oct 30) should be the protection of catchments and water draw zones to ensure that clean drinking water supplies are available to consumers at reasonable costs at all times.

In upstream areas, sediment loads of streams should be reduced by more environmental-friendly methods.

Plantations, small-holdings and farms in these areas should be compelled by law to treat surface runoff and waste water to required standards before being released into water courses.

Gradual and long-term steps should be taken to reduce pollution in the parts of rivers below water-intake points.

Riparian zones and wetlands along rivers should be protected, rehabilitated, or new ones created, where they have been destroyed.

The vegetation in these ecosystems stabilises river banks, traps silt, and purifies water by removing organic matter and nitrates from fertilisers used in agriculture.

Turning unused padi fields along rivers into artificial wetlands will clean rivers and reduce flooding.

All industrial and domestic waste water discharge should come within the ambit of the Environmental Quality Act 1974 to ensure that only treated waste water, as specified in the act, enter rivers.

This requirement will also help prevent rubbish from getting into waterways.

Laws and regulations relating to rivers should be reviewed and upgraded so that they are current.

The issue of unlicensed factories and squatters along riverbanks should be treated as a matter of urgency by the authorities to reduce pollution.

It is important that the campaign to clean up rivers is not confined to just removing silt and rubbish but rather to returning them to what they once were: A vibrant and rich ecosystem, teeming with fish and wildlife.

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