

Xavier: Our rivers not healthy and need serious attention

NATION

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By Vijenth Nair



Focus on environment: Dr Xavier (second from right) launching the national World River Day celebration at the Lembangan Sungai Klang office in Kuala Lumpur. Looking on are (from left) Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Nor Hisham Ahmad Dahlan, Ministry of Water, Land and Natural Resources secretary-general Datuk Dr Tan Yew Chong, Federal Territories Minister Khalid Abdul Samad and FT Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Adnan Mohd Ikhsan.

KUALA LUMPUR: Rivers in three states are the most affected by the effects of deforestation and opening up of new logging areas, says Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar.

The Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister said the three states were Kelantan, Pahang and Kedah.

“The failure to have a proper integrated system for forest management has serious effects on rivers.

“Our rivers are not healthy and need serious attention,” he said at the launch of the national-level World River Day celebrations themed “Nature for Water” at the Lembangan Sungai Klang office here yesterday.

“In Klang Valley, the problem is due to the people, who do not understand the importance of clean rivers and treat it as a rubbish dump. It is common to see waste from restaurants and industries being dumped into rivers.”

But Dr Xavier pointed out that river pollution nationwide increased by just 2% last year, compared to 2013.

He said according to a study by the Department of Environment, out of the 189 main river basins in the country, 11% were considered polluted last year.

“The increase is likely caused by rapid developments and lack of awareness on environmental conservation and preservation.

“All state and local authorities should fully enforce laws to keep rivers clean,” he said, adding that incentives and enforcements were both needed to keep the situation in check.

Dr Xavier also said the Drainage and Irrigation Department had launched the integrated river basin management programme nationwide to ensure that there was enough clean water, as well as to reduce the risk of floods and increase environmental conservation.

He said local non-governmental organisations and residents should act as “eyes and ears” to look after the rivers.

“Education is also another key area. Emphasis on the importance of environment should start from primary school to bring about a change in lifestyle.

“We are looking at law reforms for the betterment of the country,” he said, adding that the people need to embrace “shared responsibilities” in caring for the rivers.

On the presence of illegal plastic recycling factories, Dr Xavier said a special committee had been set up to look into the industry to prevent the country from being a dumping ground for recyclables, which included plastics.

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