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River rehabilitation ineffective if people treat rivers as dumping site



Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr Xavier Jayakumar (4th-left) with Federal Territories Minister Khalid Abdul Samad (2nd-left) visit the exhibition area during the National River Day celebration at the Lembangan Kolam Batu. - NSTP/MOHD KHAIRUL HELMY MOHD DIN

By [Kalbana Perimbanayagam \(/authors/kalbana-perimbanayagam\)](#) - October 14, 2018 @ 8:09pm

KUALA LUMPUR: River rehabilitation and cleaning initiatives by the government worth billions of ringgit will not be effective if the community does not play its part.

Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr Xavier Jayakumar said the lack of awareness and advocacy on environmental conservation was among the biggest challenges the ministry faced in keeping rivers clean and healthy.

He said a total of 189 rivers in Malaysia were all polluted and the condition seemed to deteriorate over the years as many find rivers to be the most convenient dumping site.

Despite numerous awareness and public outreach programmes to preserve the rivers since 2011, Xavier said the river pollution index had not improved.

Last year the river pollution index was 11 per cent as compared to 9 per cent in 2013.

"Our rivers are not healthy and no matter how much we spend to clean and improve them, river pollution remains a problem because public still continue to throw their waste into rivers.

Public outreach programmes have been widely carried by the ministry but many still lack awareness," Xavier said at the National River Day celebration themed 'Nature for Water' at Lembangan Kolam Batu here today.

He said a change of mindset and practice was vital for this to be a success.

"Until and unless the public also understand the importance and learn to take responsibility by not throwing rubbish into rivers, nothing will change. Parents should educate their children about environmental conservation from an early age so that they do not continue to treat the river as a rubbish bin," he said before witnessing the Federal Territories Minister Khalid Samad officiate the National River Day celebration this afternoon.

Also present were Kuala Lumpur Mayor Datuk Nor Hisham Ahmad Dahlan and Irrigation and Drainage Department director Datuk Ir Dr Md Nasir Md Noh.

Xavier admitted that advocacy and awareness about river rehabilitation programmes carried out by the ministry was among the toughest challenges they faced in ensuring rivers were pollution free and clean from rubbish.

He said deforestation activities were also a threat to river pollution, especially in Kelantan, Pahang and Kedah.

"Deforestation must also be monitored as it plays a big role in ensuring rivers are clean because there is a very close relation between the forest nature and river.

Xavier also reminded the public and business community, especially eateries to use proper channel to dispose of their rubbish.

Earlier, Khalid and the entourage from the ministry visited Sungai Klang, starting from Taman Negeri Selangor in Hulu Yam to the Lembengan Batu.

Khalid also launched the River of Life Citizen's Eye mobile application at the event.

Khalid said the Government would continue to work towards keeping rivers clean but called upon the community to lend a helping hand and stop polluting rivers.

He said a mega RM4.4 billion rehabilitation and beautification programme under the River of Life (RoL) project involving 8 rivers had been ongoing since 2013 covering a total distance of 10.7 km.

"This is expected to be completed in 2020 and currently 83 per cent of work has been done. Once it's fully ready we hope to have a dynamic waterfront icon with high economy value which may be comparable to rivers like Thames and so on in other countries."

Khalid said the river pollution index was also expected to improve and so was the water quality from a grade 5 water to grade 2.

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