

Agencies must act as one in cleaning rivers

REFER to "River cleaning efforts in vain" (*The Star*, July 22). Several questions come to mind.

Why are the cleaning efforts so ineffective? Are the present agencies tasked with river management adequate and appropriate?

What constitutes holistic and integrated river management?

The first solution proposed by the UTM Water Research Alliance team was to set up yet another authority (the River Basin Authority) to tackle the problem, never mind that we already have so many agencies currently involved in the task.

If having numerous agencies involved in river management has led to lack of proper coordination and demarcation of duties and responsibilities, how then would the setting up of another agency be able to solve the problem?

This is what I find the most difficult to accept. How would the new agency be able to

coordinate and streamline the task if the functions and responsibilities of existing agencies are vague and ambiguous?

I sincerely believe that the solution lies with proper deployment, streamlining, and demarcation of existing agencies.

If the overlapping functions of the Department of Environment, Department of Irrigation and Drainage, and local councils have rendered them ineffective, the solution is to sort them out.

The Government cannot and should not simply expand bureaucracy that leads to more confusion and inefficiency. Just streamline, rationalise and simplify them.

The second issue I wish to highlight is the relationship between river pollution and cleaning up efforts.

No doubt cleaning helps but this is not holistic and comprehensive. What is the point of clearing five tonnes of garbage from the river today when tomorrow another 10

tonnes are dumped into it?

This is where enforcement is seriously lacking in our country. For enforcement to be effective, it must be continuous, immediate and sufficiently punitive.

Pollution is a very protracted problem in the sense that those who pollute the river are actually "externalising" their cost or doing so for their own convenience.

It is others who have to bear the cost of their actions, which often result in stinking clogged rivers, floods and filthy water.

Hence, while cleaning, educating and creating awareness may help, it is strict enforcement that will eventually change the habit of the people. Periodic campaigns or *gotong royong* will work for a little while but they can never be sustainable without strict enforcement.

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