

17/10/1997

## Ensuring clean rivers for all States

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has proposed that each State Government establish a board to oversee the cleaning up and maintenance of rivers in their State.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said today the board would consist of officials from the Department of Environment, the Drainage and Irrigation Department and State Government officials.

"Sarawak has already established such a body and it has helped to a certain extent. I hope the other States will follow," he said.

Law, who was speaking to reporters after handing out awards to winners of the ICI-CCM Environmental Journalism Award 1997 at the Renaissance Hotel, said Dr Mahathir had mooted the idea over a month ago after returning from an overseas trip.

"He came back with many ideas on river management and maintenance, and has also proposed that we try and clean up the Selangor River first to start things off," he said.

River pollution is an increasing problem in the country despite the Government's "Love Your River" campaign, which was launched in 1993 to instil public awareness of the importance of keeping rivers clean.

According to this year's Environmental Quality quarterly report, the percentage of polluted rivers increased by 17 per cent, while the number of clean rivers went down by 16 per cent compared with last year.

Law said river management was an important agenda that required more attention but the proposal was not mandatory at this stage.

"It is important to clean and maintain the rivers, not just for public health, but because in time to come, rivers may be important for transport purposes."

When asked when the boards would be established, Law said this depended on how the State Governments responded to the proposal.

On the sudden rise in the Air Pollutant Index reading in Nilai yesterday, Law said the matter required some investigation.

Nilai's API reading, which had been holding steady at 48 until 11am, suddenly jumped to 187 when the next reading was taken at 5pm. The main pollutants at the time had also been ozone instead of the usual particulates.

"I will have to check because the reading jumped just for that period and we don't know why."

He said although the haze situation had improved, the private sector should not stop anti-haze measures such as sprinkling water from rooftops.

"These should be considered long-term measures. The water sprinkling for example, should be done for a cooling effect on the environment," he said.

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