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The black river of Sepang identified (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - What will happen to the dead Sungai Sepang and several other rivers in the Selangor/Negri Sembilan border now that they have received attention from the highest authority - the Prime Minister himself?

Will they also enjoy the benefit of better treatment like many other examples of environmental degradation spotted by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad?

DOE director-general Rosnani Ibarahim has identified the river and several others in the vicinity of both the KLIA and the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport as being badly polluted.

This followed the Prime Minister's comment at last week's Cabinet meeting that he had spotted a "blackish" river during his flight from Zimbabwe to the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport.

The fact that Sungai Sepang is one of the most polluted is not new.

The river has been repeatedly identified as being one of the most polluted due to wastes from pig farms.

But efforts thus far to improve the condition of the river have not succeeded.

Last April 20, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar had said that the State Government's efforts to clean up the river, among others, was not going well.

He had conceded that strategies to develop the industrial sector had had a negative impact on the environment.

Abu Hassan said polluters were still damaging the river despite various enforcement efforts.

On Oct 21 last year, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding had identified the Sungai Sepang as one of the 18 most polluted rivers in the country.

The DOE has been quick to respond to the Prime Minister each time he highlighted incidents of environmental degradation.

Dr Mahathir's comment on environmental degradation at the site of the Ukay/Perdana housing project site in Hulu Klang in 1997 had resulted in the developer, Projek Ikatan Rapi Sdn Bhd, being fined RM20,000 by the Sessions Court for breaching a condition attached to its Environmental Impact Assessment.

The company was also allowed a discharge not amounting to an acquittal on two other charges related to felling of trees and treatment of slopes.

The Prime Minister had earlier seen the barren project site from a helicopter.

Rosnani said the rivers were polluted, among others, with organic waste from livestock farming and domestic sewage.

She said the department was able to zero in on the rivers based on data it had been compiling from regular monitoring.

"We have investigated the complaint from the Prime Minister and have compiled a report for further action," she said.

Rosnani said Law would submit the report to the Cabinet.

Law had said that the river could be somewhere around the KLIA area, between the Negri Sembilan and Selangor border.

He had then directed the DOE to investigate the matter.

In the DOE's 1997 annual report, there were three polluted rivers in Selangor and one in Negri Sembilan.

The rivers were Sungai Buloh, Sungai Kelang and Sungai Sepang in Selangor and Sungai Jimah/Lukut Besar in Negri Sembilan.

These rivers were loaded with pollutants from livestock farming, domestic waste, industries as well as agricultural and land-clearing activities.

As for Sungai Sepang and Sungai Jimah/Lukut Besar, the main pollutant was ammoniacal nitrogen from sewage due to the presence of pig farms in these areas.

Sludge from sewage not only gives off a foul smell but also makes rivers appear black.

Sungai Jimah flows through the Bukit Pelandok area which was hit by the viral encephalitis epidemic.

As for Sungai Sepang, pig-rearing still exists in some nearby areas.

Prior to the construction of the KLIA, pig farms used to exist about a stone's throw from the airport site.

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