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Too polluted

 Water from dead rivers cannot be treated hence **UNSAFE** for consumption

BY LEE CHOON FAI

KUALA LUMPUR: Selangor's raw water supply is under grave threat as pollution has killed about 40% of the rivers in the state.

"The water in 40% of our rivers is too polluted to even be treated," Puncak Niaga Sdn Bhd executive chairman Tan Sri Rozali Ismail revealed yesterday.

He said these rivers are known as "dead rivers" as the water is highly contaminated and is not safe for consumption, as they cannot be treated.

"If you can survive for a week with water from the Klang River, I'll give you a prize," he quipped when underscoring the seriousness of the situation.

Rozali said it would take years, even decades to rehabilitate a dead river, much like how the United Kingdom took 20 years to restore the River Thames.

Speaking at the launch of Puncak Niaga's Save Rivers Brigade Club's (BPS) River Fun Day held at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) yesterday, Rozali said the dumping of toxic industrial waste, such as oil and chemical discharges, by irresponsible parties is the main cause of river destruction.

He said such dumping of toxic

waste was the cause of frequent disruption of clean water supply to consumers.

For example, there have been about 65 cases of river contamination over the past five years, with 15 over the last year alone, which forced operations at water treatment plants to be suspended and led to three million consumers being deprived of clean water supply.

However, he said enforcement efforts by government agencies, such as the environmental department in local governments, have achieved only modest results as public awareness of environmental issues has been lacking.

After a series of contamination incidents in 1998, which forced several water treatment plants to suspend operations, Puncak Niaga formed BPS in the firm belief that educating youths on the importance of environmental preservation needed to be emphasised.

"The youth are the future generation of our country who will go on to become entrepreneurs or businessmen as well ... who will one day open factories of their own but will keep environmental preservation in mind," he said.

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Coming down hard on polluters

► FROM FRONT PAGE

“Not only do they represent the future generation, but they can go home and educate their parents and relatives, the older generation, as well and tell them why they should not throw rubbish into rivers,” he added.

BPS now has 15,494 members from 66 branches in various primary schools, secondary schools, and higher learning institutions, most of whom are children of Puncak Niaga and Syabas staff.

Meanwhile, Selangor state executive councillor for infrastructure, public amenities and

agro-based industries, Zaidy Abdul Talib, said the state government is coming down hard on those who pollute rivers, but said it is impossible to have complete prevention.

“For example, the state government is now seizing the lands of businesses which dump their waste into the river, but it is impossible to monitor the more than 500km network of rivers,” he said.

Zaidy agreed that education may perhaps be the most effective method of preventing water pollution as water supply shortage is a matter that transcends race, religion, and politics as it will affect all.

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Some of the participants doing their bit to clean up the river during 'BPS River Fun Day' at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia, Kepong, yesterday.