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# 'Bauxite land can be rehabilitated'

**LONG PROCESS:** But it will take 50 years to fully rejuvenate mining areas, says minister

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IT will take at least 50 years to fully rehabilitate Kuantan's bauxite mining areas, said Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar.

He said the ministry had instructed the Department of Environment to visit the affected areas and conduct in-depth studies on the soil, with the cooperation of Universiti Teknologi Mara professors, who had researched the area.

"We can cure the damage done by mining activities. The Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in Kepong is a good example of rejuvenated mining land.

"Areas affected by bauxite mining, such as Bukit Goh, Kuantan, can be rehabilitated, but the entire process of rejuvenating the land would take at least 50 years.

"We will have to plant a cover crop to nutrify the soil and increase fertility, and then remove the topsoil. We can then grow trees such as pinus," he said, adding that planting cover crops was an easy way to revitalise the soil.

"Cover crops help to retain the

soil, reduce erosion, mineral leaching and compaction, and the cover crop's root system provides organic matter and opens passageways that improve air and water movement in the soil."

However, he said, it could be costly to carry out the rehabilitation process.

Wan Junaidi said he had held discussions with the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) on plans to develop housing projects on land damaged by bauxite mining.

"If they agreed to do so, we wouldn't have to cure the land as it would not pose a health risk to the residents. But, it's a long process, from seeking approval to acquiring the land from the state and finally developing the area.

"The process will take at least six months. However,

if Felda does not take up the plan, I have discussed the issue with Forestry Department director-general (Datuk Seri Dr Abd Rahman Rahim) about rehabilitating the land," he said here yesterday after officiating the Malaysia-Korea seminar on healthy river basin.

The *New Straits Times* had, in a series of exclusive articles, exposed the impact of bauxite mining to the environment and the people living nearby areas.

NST commissioned several lab-

oratory analyses, showing that not only the water, but also air and marine life had been contaminated with heavy metals, which could cause cancer in the long run.

Meanwhile, Wan Junaidi said the ministry would emulate South Korea's measures on cleaning polluted rivers.

According to the Environment Quality Report 2014 by the Department of Environment, he said,

Malaysia reported that its percentage of clean rivers had decreased to 52 per cent in 2014 compared with 54 per cent in 2013.

The number of polluted rivers increased from five per cent in 2013 to nine per cent in 2014.

"Before this figure becomes more critical, aggressive and proactive action should be taken with the collaboration and support from all stakeholders.

"We can't take this issue lightly. There is evidence that Selangor had lost several possible investors due to the water shortage issue."

Wan Junaidi said the National Hydraulic Research Institute has come up with an integrated drainage system (which controls the quantity and quality of drainage water and treats them) and hydraulics marker (used for the demarcation of a buffer zone) to address the issue.

"We can cure the damage done by mining activities. The Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in Kepong is a good example of rejuvenated mining land.

**Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar**  
Natural resources and environment minister