

Headline	Pollutant-absorbing plants to clean up Sungai Rui		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	12 Apr 2019	Color	Full Color
Section	Metro	Circulation	175,986
Page No	4	Readership	527,958
Language	English	ArticleSize	433 cm ²
Journalist	IVAN LOH	AdValue	RM 21,791
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 65,373



PERAK

Pollutant-absorbing plants to clean up Sungai Rui

By IVAN LOH
ivanloh@thestar.com.my

PLANTS may hold the key to helping clean up low levels of arsenic pollution in Sungai Rui, Hulu Perak.

A discussion is now ongoing between the Perak Forestry Department and Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) to search for plants that can absorb pollution.

Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Faizal Azumu said the task force that was set up to look into the polluted river issue had recommended the move in its bid to clean up the river.

He said it was one of its suggestions to rehabilitate idle mining areas near the river.

"We will execute it once the species of plant have been identified.

"For now, the state Department of Environment will continue to monitor the situation there," he said during a press conference at the state secretariat building.

"The task force will be informed of any




Recent checks showed low levels of arsenic in Sungai Rui. Villagers along the river have complained about skin problems which they believe are linked to the river contamination. (Right) Ahmad Faizal says the state Department of Environment will continue to monitor the situation at Sungai Rui.

further drop in river water quality," he added.

It was reported earlier this week that the state had found low amounts of arsenic in Sungai Rui.

State Environment Committee chairman Dr Abdul Aziz Bari, who called a press conference to highlight the matter, said there had been incidences of people getting skin cancer, believed to be related to the river water, but this was later refuted by Deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye.

The villagers had complained of dead fish found floating in the river, with some folk linking their skin diseases to the pollution.

Ahmad Faizal earlier announced that all logging activities in Hulu Perak had been frozen until a conclusive report on the river pollution was obtained.

He said arsenic existed naturally in the ground in Hulu Perak, but 100 years of man-made activities could have caused it to seep into the river.

"The presence of arsenic in the river may have been caused by land clearing, mining activities, farming and erosion.

"Even though the pollution level is low, despite its murky and silted condition, we are serious in tackling this issue," he said.

"The freeze needs to be done, and we do it as we are responsible for the people," Ahmad Faizal said, adding that the state expected to lose some RM30mil in revenue from the move.

When asked whether mining activities there would be stopped, Ahmad Faizal said the operations would continue.

He said the mining companies there were adhering to strict conditions to minimise pollution.

"They are required to provide reports on water quality and effluent analysis to our Mineral and GeoScience Department regularly," he said.

Ahmad Faizal said the state Health Department had checked and taken hair

samples from 300 people near Kampung Ayer Ganda in Hulu Perak.

He said of the 300, about 20 had skin conditions and that the samples had been sent to the Institute of Medical Research for analysis to check if there was any link to the polluted water.

"The report is expected to be ready by May or June.

"It is not certain that the water there can cause cancer. It could be from other sources," he said.

"This is why we kept the matter quiet and did not inform the public, as we did not want to cause panic.

"Until we get something conclusive, we will not announce anything," he added.

Meanwhile, the National Water Services Commission (SPAN) has announced that the Ayer Ganda, Gerik water treatment plant has been shut down as a precautionary measure due to the discovery of trace amounts of arsenic in the water.