

# Need to monitor river quality

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KOTA KINABALU: Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Seri Yahya Hussin has proposed the setting up of a committee to monitor the cleanliness of rivers in the State, especially Sungai Petagas.

He expressed disappointment over the cleanliness of Sungai Petagas which had been used to dump garbage, and industrial waste and effluents.

"We've got information about lorries unloading industrial waste into the river late at night and early morning.

"This makes the river so polluted," he said, after opening the conservation of freshwater prawns and a community awareness programme on the importance of Sungai Petagas in Kampung Petagas, Thursday.

Yahya, who is also State Agriculture and Food Industry Minister, said the proposed committee could raise public awareness on their role in protecting precious river ecosystems and its cleanliness.

He welcomed University Malaysia Sabah's initiative in improving the condition of Sungai Petagas and other rivers in Sabah.

Yahya said the rapid growth of the Putatan district, which has a population of about 50,000, has a far-reaching impact on the functions and conditions of Sungai Petagas.

"That is the aim of this campaign. It is about an awareness to rehabilitate the rivers because if the community in the State know about and care of their rivers, they will take the trouble not to throw any rubbish or toxic substances including from factories into the river.

"So what is happening here is as if the rivers have become a dumping ground for rubbish not only from villagers but also from industries and factories.

"We even received information that sometimes in the middle of the night or early morning, some irresponsible people use lorries to dispose of their industrial waste which end up polluting the river.

"That is what the campaign today is about, an awareness about taking care of the rivers while we also release fish and prawn fries into the river," he said

"I have also suggested to the Putatan District Office that a committee be set up to monitor rivers and especially the Petagas river and it is my hope also for other rivers in the State so that the villagers living alongside them will be more



**Yahya and Saleem presenting fish and prawn fries to Petagas area village chiefs.**

committed and responsible in taking care of them.

"We have seen Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) committed to assist us in improving the situation in the rivers statewide and, especially, the Petagas river here which is still in a poor state.

"Likewise we are also suggesting to the villagers that they refrain from continuing to build their homes along the riverbanks.

"Most of the existing riverbank homes have their backs toward the river. So we are urging those with lands next to the river instead to build their homes facing the river so they can admire the beauty of the river rather than the river being relegated to the back.

"Also structures including homes should not be set up on the riparian reserve along the rivers. That is our goal one day that the riparian reserves along the river be devoid of any structures but turned into a recreational and beautiful place for the enjoyment of all and the rivers beside the reserves become clean and naturally full of life."

On when this goal would be achieved, Yahya said progress has been made since the campaign was first launched in April.