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'Only RM3m for 100 bridges'

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - A budget of RM3 million is simply not enough to maintain 100 bridges. Auditor-General Tan Sri Hadenan A. Jalil cited this today while noting that insufficient allocations were partly to blame for the poor maintenance of public infrastructure.

"Maintenance requires big money," he said when contacted today. "Bigger allocations should be given so that heads of department or agency can set their priorities right." Hadenan mentioned the RM3 million bridge maintenance allocation as just one instance uncovered in a recent study on the maintenance of government facilities.

"This is simply not enough," he said when asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's statement in Kuching yesterday that inadequate maintenance, coupled with vandalism, was costing a lot of money. A Public Works Department source said today the bill for maintaining or repairing a bridge could be as low as RM5,000 or as high as RM1 million, depending on the type of bridge and repairs needed.

Hadenan pointed out that the specific performance in maintenance by government departments was touched on in the Auditor-General's yearly report, available on its website (www.audit.gov.my). "Sometimes, we carried out specific studies to determine the level of maintenance at government buildings and facilities. "The work was indeed carried out but not satisfactorily, mainly due to limited budgets."