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Ministry in bid to stop biopiracy

BIO THEFT: Law to protect traditional knowledge of indigenous people will be tabled in Parliament

THE government is gathering momentum in the fight against biopiracy, or biological theft, where indigenous plants were collected by corporations which patented them for their own use to the detriment of the country where they originated from.

Natural Resources and Environment Ministry's Biodiversity and Forestry Management deputy undersecretary K. Nagulendran said biopiracy occurred physically and ethnologically, namely by stealing traditional knowledge and local practices.

Citing an example, he said American scientists in Sarawak had documented traditional knowledge of a tree from the ethnic community and turned it into a product, which had gone through a clinical trial for a

possible anti-HIV vaccine.

"So, all these (biodiversity products) have potential. It is important that the traditional knowledge of indigenous people needs to be protected," he said at a consultative session with Orang Asli, local communities and non-governmental organisations on the drafting of the Biological Resources and Benefit Sharing Bill here yesterday.

Chaired by minister Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, the bill was expected to be tabled in Parliament at its next session.

Nagulendran said previously, foreign researchers had to follow guidelines by the Economic Planning Unit by filling up forms before carrying out research.

"They also have to inform the government what they are taking out of the country. As this is merely a guideline and not legally binding, we are worried that something had already been taken out of the country without permission."

However, he said there was no accurate record on the number of biopiracy cases as there were no authorities and agencies monitoring them.

He hoped that with the enforcement of the bill, relevant authorities would be set up to combat biopiracy. **Bernama**