

Headline	Govt gaining pace in fight against biopiracy		
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Govt gaining pace in fight against biopiracy

THE government is gathering momentum in the fight against biopiracy or biological theft where indigenous plants were collected by corporations who 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 under-secretary K Nagulendran said biopiracy occurred physically as well as ethnologically, namely by stealing traditional knowledge and local practices.

He said for example, in

Sarawak, American scientists 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 (human immunodeficiency virus) vaccine.

"So all these (biodiversity products) have potential. What is important, is that the traditional knowledge of ingenious people needs to be protected," he said.

He was speaking to reporters at the consultative session with Orang Asli, local communities and non-governmental organisations on the draft-

ing of the Biological Resources and Benefit Sharing Bill in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Chaired by Deputy Natural Resources and Environment Minister Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, the bill is expected to be tabled in Parliament at its next session.

Nagulendran said previously, foreign researchers had to abide by conditions in a guideline imposed by the Economic Planning Unit by filling up specific forms before carrying out research.

"And they also had to inform the government what they were taking out of the country.

As this was merely a guideline, and not legally binding, we are worried that something has already been taken out of the country without permission," he said.

However, he said there are no accurate records on the number of biopiracy cases as there were no authorities or agencies monitoring them.

"It's happening, but we don't know the number of cases involved," said Nagulendran, adding that with the enforcement of the law, he hoped specific authorities would be set up to combat biopiracy. — *Bernama*