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Biodiversity policy mat be launched mid-February

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THE National Biodiversity Policy, aimed at conserving the country's flora and fauna as well as creating a safe, healthy and productive environment is expected to be launched by the middle of next month.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said the policy will be launched as soon as it has been translated into Bahasa Malaysia. Details will be released to the media soon, he added.

The term biodiversity refers to a whole range of plants, animals and micro-organisms, from genes to ecosystems.

Malaysia is rated as one of the world's 12 "megadiversity" countries with over 150,000 species of invertebrates, 286 mammal species, 736 bird species and 15,000 types of flowering plants.

The policy was approved by the Cabinet with some minor ammendments after the draft was submitted for the second time on October 22 1996.

Drawn up by the National Biodiversity Committee, the National Biodiversity Policy, was part of the commitment Malaysia made at the historic June 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

When asked on a country report on biodiversity, Law said, there are none so far, but the ministry is working towards establishing this.

"We are trying to put things in place ... one by one. First it is the policy and a directorate headed by a ired professor and assisted by ministry officials.

"The directorate will be in charge of compiling data and inventories. This is a very difficult task as the data cover all species available, their location and numbers. So far, the response has been good," Law said.

He was speaking to reporters after attending Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Hari Raya open house at Sri Perdana yesterday.

The drafting of the policy was done after consultations with various state governments and related government agencies.

In 1995, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the Government had initiated a study on biodiversity and formed a group to examine the implications of biotechnology and its commercialisation.

The Government recognises the importance of biotechnology and its potential applications in agriculture, animal husbandry, health, the manufacturing industry, energy and environment.

The policy also comprises strategies to conserve biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources.

It outlines an action programme for each strategy geared towards achieving adequate protection of the country's resources.

It underscores the imperatives of managing the country's natural resources to ensure long-term economic benefits, food security and environmental stability.

This is because a diversity of biological resources provides direct economic benefits.

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