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Cabinet orders probe into land clearing near Taman Negara

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The tabling for the first time to the Cabinet of satellite pictures of environmentally sensitive areas yielded results today.

The Cabinet at its meeting chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, directed that investigations be carried out on the ecological impact of what is believed to be land clearing near Taman Negara.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said land cleared for logging, oil palm and rubber plantations at the national park should be checked before its ecological system is affected.

Satellite images taken in March last year showed that land clearing was taking place along the borders of Taman Negara in Kelantan and Pahang.

However, the Terengganu border, part of the Tasik Kenyir catchment area, is relatively undisturbed, Law told reporters after the meeting.

He warned that if the clearing was uncontrolled, it may affect the ecological system of Taman Negara.

Earlier, Law had submitted the satellite images and a report on the park to the Cabinet as directed last month.

Taman Negara, a national park with an acreage of 4,343 square kilometres, borders Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu.

However, the areas where land clearing is taking place were not forest reserves, Law said.

Forest reserves nearby included the Tekai Tembeling and Gunung Rabung reserves in Pahang.

Law said 50,676 tourists visited Taman Negara in 1997, of which 23,000 were foreigners.

Dr Mahathir had directed the Malaysian Centre for Remote Sensing to monitor all protected areas, including water catchments, forest reserves, highland development sites, wildlife sanctuaries, parks and highly sensitive coastal areas.

Law was directed to submit data, accompanied by satellite images, to the Cabinet on a regular basis.

Earlier, Law presented RM20,000 to winners of the 1998 National Science Quiz.

The winners are three Form Five students of Sekolah Menengah Bantuan St Joseph, Kuching. They are Timothy Adrian ak Jinam, Wilson Wong Chiong King and Tan Ek Han.

The money, contributed by Sapura Holdings, will sponsor an eight-day study trip to the United Kingdom.

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