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Encroachment at forest reserves within MSC

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Cabinet wants the Selangor State Government to look into extensive encroachment at three major forest reserves within the Multimedia Super Corridor.

Images taken by the United States' Landsat satellite last February showed that the Air Hitam, South Kuala Langat and North Kuala Langat forest reserves were under major threat.

The images, obtained by the Malaysian Centre for Remote Sensing (Macres), were submitted to the Cabinet by Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding today.

They showed that 34 per cent of the Air Hitam, 32 per cent of the South Kuala Langat and 15 per cent of the North Kuala Langat forest reserves had been converted for built-up areas and agriculture.

These reserves were mapped out by the Forestry Department in 1982.

The satellite images showed the state of the forests and land around the MSC covering a 180,000ha area.

Law said the images also showed the forest cover around the MSC area had been significantly reduced.

"About 80 per cent of the area are affected by activities such as urbanisation, agriculture and development," said Law.

The area is considered environmentally sensitive.

It comprises a mixture of complex ecosystems including peat swamp forests, lakes, mining land and dry land forests.

Law said any development activity, if not properly carried out, would affect the ecosystems of adjacent areas.

For instance, the ground water tapping and construction of drainage systems for the Cyberjaya project could affect the nearby Paya Indah Wetlands Sanctuary if there was poor design and planning.

The sanctuary is located in the southern tip of the North Kuala Langat Forest Reserve.

"The Cabinet has directed me to submit the satellite images to the Selangor Menteri Besar so that action could be taken to protect the whole area," said Law.

Law said the integrated conservation and development principles for the Paya Indah wetlands sanctuary should be used for all future projects in the area.

"Paya Indah is a showcase for an environmentally-sound development. Its development is in tandem with efforts to conserve the environment.

"We will recommend to the State Government to make this project a model for all other future projects," he said.

Law said this was to safeguard the forests against further ecological deterioration caused by development activities.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad directed Macres to monitor all environmentally sensitive and protected areas.

The Prime Minister was concerned about the rampant cutting of trees and the problem of encroachment into protected areas.

The areas to be monitored include water catchments, forest reserves, highland development sites, wildlife sanctuaries, parks and highly sensitive coastal areas.

Law was directed to submit these data to the Cabinet on a regular basis.

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