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Lojing in an `adverse' environmental situation

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Lojing in Kelantan, which is covered by the Cabinet's highlands study, is in an "adverse" environmental situation, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Law Hieng Ding said today.

And yet, despite Cabinet policy to ban all new development projects in the areas under study, the Federal Government cannot act against States who have the final authority over their land use.

"The State Government must be very careful in planning development there.

"They should learn from what happened to Cameron Highlands," Law said.

Law said he had received a preliminary report by Ministry officials on Lojing and was now waiting for a detailed study.

He was asked to respond to the recent announcement by Kelantan Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman who said a new township would be developed there to support and boost existing agricultural activities there.

Abdul Halim had said the move would be in line with the national objective of being a food-producing nation.

Lojing is adjacent to the Blue Valley in Cameron Highlands and is part of the Simpang Pulai-Lojing-Gua Musang-Kuala Berang highway project.

The highway is scheduled for completion in 2003 and would serve as an east-west link.

Cameron Highlands is the focus of a study ordered by the Cabinet to check on the area's capacity to accommodate development.

The Cabinet last year called for a temporary ban on all new development projects there pending the study's completion.

Asked if the State had violated the ban, Law said: "They are not in the Federal Government.

"The ban is a Cabinet decision."

He was speaking at a Press conference after a signing ceremony between the Malaysian Centre for Remote Sensing and the Forestry Department.

A source familiar with the Lojing situation said with Cameron Highlands coming under close scrutiny, many farmers had taken to moving their activities to Lojing.

"Land there is also cheaper," he told the New Straits Times.

Law also said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had recently expressed concern over indiscriminate tree-cutting and land-clearing.

"The Prime Minister has said this many times over and recently, he repeated it again."

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