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Johor centre for Cuban biotech items

JOHOR BARU, Wed. - Johor has been appointed the distribution centre for Cuban bio-technology, pharmaceutical and health tourism products in the country and the region.

The co-operation was sealed today with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Johor and Cuban consortiums.

Under the MoU, both parties would also explore the possibility of making Johor the research and development and production point for these products.

The State Government's involvement in this venture is through the Johor Education Foundation and three other local companies - Chemical Company of Malaysia, Floreat Enterprises and Kumpulan Sungei Chat.

The Cuban consortium is led by the Centre for Bio-technology and Genetic Engineering through its commercial arm, Heber Biotech, with the participation of Laboratorios Dalmer, Labiofam, Servimed and Medicuba.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, and Cuba Foreign Trade Vice-Minister Orlando Hernandez, who represented his Government.

Ghani said the MoU was an initiative pursued by the Johor Government during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's maiden visit to Cuba in September 1997. Ghani was also part of the delegation.

"During the visit, we found Cuba to be highly advanced in the field of bio-technology and pharmaceuticals. The country also has its niches in health tourism. By virtue of its tropical climate, Cuba has also established itself in the treatment of tropical diseases such as dengue, malaria, hepatitis and meningitis," he said.

Ghani was speaking at a Press conference after the signing ceremony.

The Menteri Besar said initially the Johor consortium would seek to obtain a distribution licence and later proceed to manufacture the products locally.

He said the Johor consortium had already obtained an agreement with the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Bio-technology of UTM, to conduct joint research with institutes in Cuba.

Cuba is also a world leader in treating specific lifestyle ailments including high blood pressure, hypertension and arteriosclerosis.

The country has also formulated a drug, called the PPG, which controls cholesterol and high blood pressure. The drug, which also enhances blood circulation, has also been found to be a remedy for impotence.

Hernandez described the MoU as the beginning of a lasting co-operation between the two Governments and institutions.

"The MoU would enable the two parties to carry out technical and financial feasibility studies to identify particular areas for joint ventures," he added.

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