

# Blueprint to produce local vaccines and health products

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**KUALA LUMPUR, Fri.** — A National Institute for Natural Products and Vaccinology (NINPV) which will be set up by 2005 will create the blueprint for Malaysia to research, develop and produce its own vaccines and natural health products.

“This will make Malaysia self-reliant and recognised as an exporting nation for vaccines and natural products, saving the nation some RM48 million annually on imports,” Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said today.

He said the need for such an institute arose in light of new microbes that could threaten humanity at any time such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

Chua said Malaysia must be prepared in the light of geopolitical factors, the inadequacy of future supplies of vaccines for children, and against diseases prevalent in the region including dengue, Nipah, enterovirus, Japanese encephalitis as well as potential threats of bioterrorism.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had announced the setting up of the institute on May 21 under the eco-

nomie development stimulus package.

“The Prime Minister has rightly identified Malaysia’s home-grown herbal medicinal products as one of the sources of growth in the future,” he said at his ministry today.

Prior to this project, Chua said there had been no co-ordinated efforts to reap the benefits of the nation’s bio-diversity.

Malaysia is ranked among the 12 mega-diversity rich countries in the world and fourth in Asia after China, India and Indonesia.

Chua said the institute’s functions would include helping the National Committee for Research and Development on Herbal Medicine do research on market potential of herbal medicinal products.

It would also create a conducive environment for developing impor-

tant vaccines, using the latest technologies as well as develop entrepreneurship among researchers.

“We will also co-operate nationally and internationally to establish smart partnerships with universities, other research institutes in the country, the private sector, and centres of excellence all over the

world on research and development already done,” Chua said.

He said that senior IMR researcher, virologist and specialist, Dr Nor Shahidah Khairullah, will head the institute.

Chua said the institute would be located within the BioValley Malaysia in an area south of Cyber-

jaya, adding that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment has signed a letter of intent providing a 4,645 square metre building with basic amenities and access roads.

“Meanwhile, research activities will be initiated and housed in the Institute of Medical Research in Jalan Pahang.”

The entire project including infrastructure and equipment needs is estimated to cost RM220 million over five years for both natural products and vaccine research and development, Chua said, adding that the annual operational costs was estimated to be RM5 million.

“The project is still at the planning stage. We will re-examine whether IMR would continue doing research once the new institute is established,” Chua said.