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BioValley Malaysia launched

MALAYSIA'S vision to become a key player in the biotechnology industry has moved a step closer to reality with the launch of the BioValley Malaysia project. BioValley Malaysia is a government-backed initiative designed to accelerate the growth of the local biotechnology industry.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the project on May 20. According to him, biotechnology is an integral part of Malaysia's vision of becoming a developed country by 2020. He says the project will be a key enabler to spearhead the growth of the biotechnology industry in Malaysia. Furthermore, he says, the project can help curb the possible problem of bio-piracy as experienced by other developing countries.

BioValley Malaysia will be developed in two phases on a 2,000-acre naturally landscaped site in Dengkil, south of Cyberjaya, the nation's multimedia hub. It is understood that the federal government owns 500 acres of the land while the Selangor state government owns the remainder. Some 200 acres will be developed in the first phase, involving the setting up of three core national institutes, namely the Agro-Biotechnology Institute, the Pharmaceutical and Nutraceutical Institute, and the Genomics and Molecular Biology Institute.

The BioValley Development Corporation (BDC) will also be established and located there. The BDC will be responsible for the development of BioValley Malaysia. The three institutes are expected to be completed and operational in 2006.

The occasion also saw the signing of three letters of intent between the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE) and three parties - Inproser Technologies Sdn Bhd, INS Zhen-Ao Biotech Corporation Sdn Bhd and the Ministry of Health.

Of the three, Inproser is expected to be the single largest investor. According to the president of Inproser, Henri ten Have, the company has allocated RM75 million for establishing a manufacturing plant in BioValley Malaysia. The plant is expected to commence operations by year-end. A spokesperson of INS Zhen-Ao Biotech, meanwhile, indicates that the company has earmarked RM25 million for setting up a plant in BioValley Malaysia. The plant is likely to be in place within a year.

According to Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Law Hieng Ding, BioValley Malaysia will house a wide spectrum of biotechnology-related activities such as drug research and bio-processes operating on different platform technologies.

The Selangor state government's investment arm, Kumpulan Darul Ehsan Berhad (KDEB), through its subsidiary Kumpulan Hartanah Selangor Berhad (KHSB), has been given the mandate to implement the project based on a smart partnership concept with MOSTE.

According to Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, the University Industry Selangor (UNISEL) will also utilise 50 acres of land at BioValley Malaysia for the establishment of its biotechnology faculty and business directorate. 'Its main objective is to produce skilled and qualified researchers and entrepreneurs to help the government accelerate and maximise capabilities of human resource development and excellence in biotechnology area,' he says.

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