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PM's call to Japanese scientists

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JAPANESE scientists and executives in the field of research met Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday, giving the Prime Minister an opportunity to explain Malaysia's plan for research in the multi-million ringgit Bio-Valley project.

At a meeting in his suite at the Imperial Hotel, Dr Mahathir invited them to visit and contribute to Bio-Valley, a project too important to be ignored and sidelined. The Bio-Valley project is located in Dengkil with an initial budget of about RM500 million. The Prime Minister launched it in May this year.

The scientists were told that while the Bio-Valley is a Malaysian initiative, Japanese and other foreign scientists and researchers were welcome to participate.

The findings, especially in life sciences, could be very useful to the rest of the world, Dr Mahathir said.

"Proper use of the Bio-Valley where world scientists can set up research centres and laboratories can also yield important findings on how to combat new diseases such as the recent outbreak of SARS, besides countering new strains of old diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis," Dr Mahathir said.

Research on food science was also important and necessary, the Prime Minister said. Malaysia, he said, is a small country but rich in bio-diversity. The Bio-Valley project is Malaysia's contribution to world sciences and researchers are welcome to set up offices there, he said.

He was hopeful that big corporations and even the Japanese Government would offer assistance to enable the project to serve the world better and more effectively.

In the afternoon, the Prime Minister visited the Riken Yokohama Institute, about an hour's drive from the Japanese capital. Among others, the institute conducts research in allergy and immunology, plant science, brain science, frontier research and genomic sciences.

Founded in 1917, the Riken institute has grown in stature with international collaboration comprising attachment by visiting scientists from 47 countries.

Dr Mahathir arrived here on Tuesday. He is scheduled to deliver a keynote address at an international conference tomorrow before leaving for home on Friday.