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RM50m project to help local scientists make vaccines for the world

SERDANG, Thurs. - Universiti Putra Malaysia and the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology of Cuba have embarked on a RM50 million project to help local scientists produce vaccines for common and infectious diseases here.

UPM head of Laboratory Immunotherapeutic and Vaccine Department, associate professor Dr Mohd Azmi Mohd Lila, who leads the "Development of Vaccines and Immunotherapeutic Products" project, said his department was studying the types of diseases and vaccines.

He said the project would ensure that the products penetrate local and international markets. He said the project, which started last year, would be completed in 2006.

"If we were to start such projects from scratch, it will take us at least seven years.

"With foreign co-operation, we will be able to produce the results in a shorter time frame.

"We will modify the viral vaccines available in Cuba to comply with our standards and make the changes accordingly so that the vaccines are much more improved and are cheaper," he added.

The project, which is funded by the Government and UPM, is a collaboration mooted by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was in Cuba in 1997 to enhance bilateral trades between two countries.

"The Cuban research institutes are providing the technology as well as the research and development findings," he said, adding that the project was also backed by a local pharmaceutical company.

He said the project under the purview of the UPM Institute of Bio-Science would also include efforts to train local experts in producing viral vaccines and exchange programmes for Cuban experts to be based in UPM.

"We have started work on the project and a team will travel to Cuba on Sunday to sign agreements on this," he said.