

**Biotech Growth Encouraging, Says Muhyiddin
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SHAH ALAM, Dec 27 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the growth of the biotechnology industry in Malaysia has been very encouraging and the sector could become one of the biggest contributors to the national income.

He said in just a few years, the biotechnology industry has grown rapidly in line with global trends and the number of biotechnology companies is expected to grow, generating more revenue and skilled jobs while attracting more investments.

Muhyiddin made the remarks when launching the BioNexus Partners Programme (BNP) and announcing the completion of the Malay Genome Mapping project at the Universiti Teknologi MARA campus in Puncak Alam here today.

"I was informed that biotechnology projects have provided a positive impact as entry point projects (EPP) under the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) of agriculture, medicine, palm oil and related products as well as oil and gas," he said.

He said this encompassing of diverse sectors by biotechnology is one of the main reasons it has been identified as the main driver in the nation's drive towards a high-income and knowledge-based economy.

He said through BiotechCorp, set up in 2005 as the agency responsible for developing the nation's biotechnology, a total of 207 BioNexus-status biotechnology firms have been set up with approved investments exceeding RM2.0 billion.

BioNexus-status firms, both local and international, are eligible for incentives and grants from BiotechCorp.

The investments are in the three main biotechnology focus areas of agriculture, healthcare and industry, he said.

Although Malaysia's biotechnology is still at a developing stage, it is encouraging that over 50 per cent of the companies are small-and-medium enterprises that have shown their ability to grow rapidly in the nation's new economic conditions, he added.

"I was also informed that three per cent of BioNexus firms are listed on the bourses in Malaysia, Australia and Europe," he said.

Muhyiddin said the growing biotechnology industry offers lucrative careers that will greatly benefit university students.

The country's public and private higher institutions of learning have produced some 16,000 life sciences graduates, he said, adding the National Biotechnology Policy (NBP) targets to generate a minimum of 80,000 biotechnology jobs by 2020.

He said the aim of producing highly competent and marketable graduates can be achieved through continued commitment and strategic cooperation between the government and universities.

Muhyiddin said he was informed that the BioNexus programme currently involves a total of 56 laboratories in public institutions of higher learning, research institutes and government-linked corporations, who are all in the BNP network.

He also congratulated UiTM for its involvement in the BNP programme through its three laboratories -- the Analysis Unit, Whole Genome Sequencing Unit and Integrated Systemic Biology Unit -- under its Pharmacogenomics Centre (PROMISE).

He said UiTM's success in the BNP shows its ability to provide international standard infrastructure in line with the government's aim of producing globally-competitive Bumiputeras, adding PROMISE has provided services to foreign firms.

Muhyiddin said UiTM's Malay genome project shows the sequences and mapping of individual genomes.

"The unveiling of the this genome draft is in line with efforts by developed countries in Asia and Europe to generate information on their own people's genome to enable them to develop the most suitable health strategy for the local population," he said.

He said sophisticated scientific studies show that the risks of a person contracting a disease and the suitability of a medication are linked to a person's genome, adding this approach of "personalised medicine" is being taken by the advanced countries.

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