

## Pak Lah: Biotech growth must not pose a threat

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**SAN FRANCISCO:** Biotechnology development should not come at the expense of public safety or the environment – that is Malaysia's stand.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi made a clear statement on the matter at the Biotechnology Roundtable Meeting 2005. He said at a press conference at the end of the one-day meeting here on Monday that the assessment of risks presented by biotechnology should be based on facts and scientific evidence and not on emotions or sensationalism. Abdullah, who chaired the meeting attended by members of the international advisory panel, said Malaysia also recognised that biotechnology was a global race. He said Malaysia has its own competitive advantages and should not replicate strategies pursued by other countries.

Malaysia was advised to move quickly, balancing long-term efforts with initiatives that show results in the near term, he said. For instance, he said it was suggested that Malaysia leveraged on its advantages in outsourcing and information and communications technology as well as partner with research laboratories and pharmaceutical companies to help bring down the cost of drug development.

“The meeting emphasised that biotechnology is a marathon and not a sprint. It was pointed out that financiers need to understand the nature of biotechnology in order to make a fair assessment of the risks involved,” Abdullah said. On the meeting, he said it comprised a broad-based dialogue on developing Malaysia's biotechnology sector as a whole as well as focused discussions on agriculture biotechnology and health biotechnology.

He said the roundtable validated some of the Government's earlier thinking and also provided new ideas. Abdullah said the meeting largely agreed on areas already identified as strategic niches such as biotechnology research on palm oil and manufacturing of biomedical devices. The meeting also presented other strategic areas such as biotechnology research on farm animals, especially due to the increased crossover of diseases from animals to humans, he added.

He said Malaysia needed to rapidly build up its human capital in biotechnology, particularly in relation to scientists and bioentrepreneurs.