

Private sector urged to be proactive in biotech research

By LESTER KONG

KOTA KINABALU: The State Government wants the private sector to be more proactive in biotechnology research and product development.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Hj Aman said they should complement the research work of institutions like Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in the field.

"We would also like to see the private sector coming in to contribute and give their cooperation," Musa said to the media after opening the Second Biotechnology Symposium at UMS on Wednesday.

The symposium also saw the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Korea Research

Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology (KRIBB) and UMS.

Musa said the private sector should emulate what the university is doing in terms of collaborative research with overseas institutions like KRIBB.

He said it was impressive how KRIBB had joint venture ties with about 30 private organisations in various fields to create new products through their mutual research.

It is a good sign that UMS is pursuing research with overseas universities as well, he said.

"The State Government is very much keen and will fully support this MoU, which we feel will benefit the country, especially Sabah."

Musa reiterated the Government's working committee on biotechnology will, among others, consolidate research findings provided by UMS and channel them into commercial product development.

But in terms of Budget funding, Musa informed that there is no definite allocation for biotechnology development.

"We don't have fixed allocation but it is (allocated) as and when necessary. It all depends on how much they (researchers) are willing to ask for."

"The committee will decide on the requirements and what we need. The government will then consider," Musa said.

To a question on whether

a department was needed to oversee the development of biotechnology, Musa replied that it was still too early to see tangible contributions to the economy from biotechnology.

This was because much of the research is still in its infancy, he said.

But he said the working committee under Science and Technology Adviser Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili would be sufficient for the time being.

"What is important here is exploiting the natural biological resources that we have. We are still doing preliminary research," he said.

Meanwhile, UMS Vice-Chancellor Tan Sri Abu Hassan Othman said he was confident that results could

be shown in two to three years.

But for now, he said research was ongoing and that collaborations with other scientific authorities need to be established.

"As and when the time comes, we will build up our collaborations with other institutions. This is a very advanced kind of research."

"Therefore, we need to collaborate and learn from mistakes and experiences of more advanced institutions like KRIBB, in terms of research and consolidation of the products," he said.

So far, Abu Hassan said only one company involved in cosmetics had adopted UMS' research findings on seaweed and converted it for commercial use.



Musa (third from right) witnessing the exchange of documents between Abu Hassan (left) and KRIBB chairman, Prof Kyu Hwan Yang, yesterday. Also present was Principal Research Scientist, Head of Environmental Biotechnology at KRIBB, Dr Hee Moch Oh (second from right).— Bernamapic