

Special UMS lab for research on diseases



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KOTA KINABALU: Any infectious and fatal strain of disease in Sabah can now be brought to a special containment lab called Biosafety Level 3 Lab (BS3Lab) in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) for research analysis and to find cures.

UMS Vice-Chancellor Prof. Datuk Dr Kamaruzaman Ampon (**pic**) said the special lab is among two facilities at a new Biotechnology Research Institute (BRI) building to be launched in January.

"BRI would be equipped with cutting edge equipment that will enable UMS researchers to do cutting edge research focused on biotechnology as well as providing some catalyst to vital commercial economic output in Sabah such as the bioindustry. "Hence, the university has embarked on setting up the BS3 Lab for BRI, which is believed to be the only such lab in Borneo and it will be operational by next year," he said.

By having such lab, he said the lab staff can take the DNA of patients suffering from infectious and fatal strains of Level 3 pathogens in Sabah like H1N1, Coxsackie B, Bird Flu and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARs) and do own research analysis to look for cures.

"It would not be necessary to send the strain of those diseases found in Sabah to three similar labs in the peninsula or other places for research analysis." Dr Kamaruzaman disclosed this in a press conference after opening the UMS Biotechnology Symposium IV 2010 at BRI, here, Wednesday.

The symposium serves as a platform for researchers from local and overseas research institutions to interact and share information and expertise in the field of biotechnology.

It also provides opportunities for UMS students and researchers to learn more about new developments to explore

biological resources through the use of novel and advance techniques. A total of 114 participants have registered, including international participants from six countries like India, South Africa, Nigeria, Iran and South Korea, among others.

"The 4th Biotechnology Symposium is of special importance to UMS as it commemorates the inauguration of BRI that has its own new building that we have been waiting for the past eight years, including the BS3 Lab. Before, the BRI was occupying part of the School of Science and Technology.

"About RM100 million has been spent to set up the BRI, including the BS3 Lab and the special containment lab would get its accreditation from the BioSafety Committee of the World Health Organisation to achieve world class standards," Dr Kamaruzaman said, adding UMS will request for more funding to buy equipment for BRI. He said the normal labs in UMS can only deal with Level 1 and 2 pathogens.

The second facility of BRI, which is the pride of UMS, he said, is the Plant Transgenic Containment/Greenhouse facility where it will modify the genes of certain plants and contain the plants that may take over national plants when exposed outside.

As for research grants, he said, the UMS researchers will be competing to procure research grants amounting to RM700 million from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and Higher Learning Ministry by next year.

"We are getting about over RM20 million as research grants from outside and we will be competing to get research grants from both ministries. The researchers have to ask for the grants if they want to ask for promotion," Dr Kamaruzaman said.

Also present was BRI Director Prof. Datin Dr Ann Anton.