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'Setting up vaccine institute will address zoonotic threats'

New Straits Times, Malaysia



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KUALA LUMPUR: The move to set up the Malaysian Institute of Genomes and Vaccines is timely as a proactive plan in addressing the current Covid-19 pandemic and other zoonotic diseases in the future.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) vaccine researcher Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Hair Bejo said the country needed to learn from the past and current experiences, and be prepared to face and handle new waves of epidemics that were



Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Hair Bejo

bound to happen.

"Most of the time, we are reacting to zoonotic diseases. When it takes place, it's time for us to act proactively.

"Covid-19 is one of the worst pandemic of zoonotic origin, but this will not be the last.

"Hence, Malaysia needs to make preparations and projections of the emergency of the new epidemic," he said.

Dr Hair said the nation must focus on resilience and agility

through implementing integrated control measures, as well as effective prevention strategies in preparing the country and its citizens to face a wide range of epidemics in the future.

The Alliance for Safe Community chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said at the moment, the country still relied on other countries for vaccines.

And this was despite the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry approving about 40 vaccine development projects since the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010).

"Malaysia can produce its own vaccines. What we need right now are clinical experts to con-

duct the first human clinical trial in the country.

"Malaysia has the experts who can produce vaccines, but we need more. Also, talent development needs to be emphasised.

"I hope more young people are nurtured with interest to become vaccine scientists," he said.

He welcomed the initiatives by Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba to table a proposal to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob in setting up an institute to locally produce Covid-19 vaccines.

"The proposed establishment of the institute which is to be known as the Malaysian Institute

of Genomes and Vaccines will facilitate the government to coordinate research and development (R&D) activities related to genomes and vaccines, as well as mobilise relevant experts efficiently.

"Apart from developing Covid-19 vaccines, the institute could also conduct R&D in the production of vaccines for other dangerous diseases, such as cancer, dengue, cholera and leptospirosis."

He added that this would require cooperation involving expertise from various stakeholders, such as ministries, agencies, institutes, the private sector and the Civil Society Organisation.



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SUMMARIES

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