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Research centre at Belum

IPOH: A Belum Valley Biodiversity and Biotechnology Centre will be set up to research and develop the natural resources of Royal Belum, one of the world's oldest tropical rainforests.

The RM78mil centre is to be built under a memorandum of understanding signed between the Perak Government and Universiti Putra Malaysia yesterday.

Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Tajol Rosli Ghazali, who witnessed the signing of the agreement, said a 600ha plot of land at Belum Valley would be approved for the university's research and development into the various indigenous species found in the rainforest.

"They will be given the right to extract specimens from the rainforest for research and development purposes," said Tajol Rosli.

He pointed out that the centre, to be completed by the end of the Ninth Malaysia Plan, would not involve the construction of buildings because it would be in its natural environment.

The centre, which would be able to boost the country's biotechnology sector, was expected to create jobs for some 500 people there, he said.

"Although the number of jobs created is not too high, the centre will also be able to generate income for the locals such as the boatmen or food caterers," added Tajol Rosli.

The university's vice-chancellor, Prof Datuk Dr Nik Mustapha R. Abdullah, who signed the memorandum of understanding on behalf of the university, said research stations and a laboratory would be set up in Gerik to help with the research and development work.

"The university team will focus on natural products like the herbs found in the tropical rainforest," he said, adding that over 100 university personnel will be involved in the research and development work at the centre.