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Rice deal

UNIVERSITI Putra Malaysia (UPM) has signed a deal with Padiberas Nasional (Bernas) worth RM16.8mil to expand research and development activities in rice and padi.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed described the partnership as a significant achievement in the ministry's efforts to increase collaboration between industry and academia.

"The ministry encourages such link-ups as they can also be a source of additional funding for universities.

"I hope this will encourage other companies to invest in R&D activities, too. However, companies cannot expect instant

results. They must invest now for the future," he said.

Mustapa added that R&D activities needed to be stepped up if Malaysia was to attain 90% self-sufficiency in rice production by 2010 compared with 72.7% now.

"Malaysia imports 30% of its rice from Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand," he said after witnessing the signing of a memorandum of understanding with UPM.

The productivity and yield of rice grown locally is well below the targets set, Mustapa said, adding that this would affect Malaysia's food security. The government wants rice farmers to produce 10 tonnes of padi per hectare by 2010.