

## CU's goal: a vaccine for Thais

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Chulalongkorn University has launched a fund-raising campaign to build a factory and make Covid-19 vaccines on campus.

The campaign, dubbed "Covid-19 Vaccine for Thais", aims to raise 500 million baht to build a factory at the campus in Samyan, says Chulalongkorn president Bandit Euaporn.

"We don't want to be the only owner of the vaccine, we want it to belong to all Thai people," Mr Bandit said yesterday. "That is why we have launched this campaign, to raise public awareness that everyone can play a part in fighting the virus.

"Moreover, the knowledge base that we have won't only be useful in dealing with Covid-19, but for other emerging diseases in the future."

The first day donations can be received will be on Friday.

Chulalongkorn University has formed 180 start-up companies, several of them medical startups, under what it terms the CU Inno-

vation Hub scheme.

One of them is Baiya Phytopharm, which recently developed the Baiya Rapid Covid-19 test kit, a quick preliminary test kit using low-nicotine tobacco leaves.

Baiya Phytopharm is also playing a part in the Covid-19 vaccine programme by using those same low-nicotine tobacco leaves to stimulate antibodies. Stakeholders in the project yesterday signed an MoU on the Covid-19 project.

Representatives from the the university's CU Enterprise Foundation signed a deal with the Government Pharmaceutical Company (GPO), Baiya Phytopharm and KinGen Biotech to team up and produce Covid-19 vaccines at the proposed factory in Samyan.

Suthira Dejkhunnavuth, CEO and co-founder of Baiya Phytopharm, said the company had already conducted laboratory tests on monkeys and these were encouraging as the monkeys duly produced Covid-19 antibodies.

The company will conduct human trials next June with 300 volunteers and expects to launch its final-stage human trials with 10,000 subjects three months later.

If everything goes as planned, Ms Suthira said the project could produce a tobacco-leaf-based Covid-19 vaccine by the end of 2021, she said.

Canada is among those countries already using similar plant based-ingredients for producing a vaccine.