JOHOR BARU: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) is gearing up to venture into research and development (R&D) of the multi-billion ringgit equine industry.

UTM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Zaini Ujang said the university hoped to capture the Southeast Asia market, particularly Singapore, as the equine industry have been left untapped in the region.

On another matter, Zaini said a total of 200 children with special needs in Johor Baru had also benefited from equine therapy over the past one year.

"Horse-riding can bring about healing and is a great stress-reliever," Zaini said.

He also appealed to sponsors to contribute horses to the university.

“We bought five horses, and the others were donated, making the number of our horses 17.

“We plan to buy another five, as we have space to accommodate up to 40 horses,” he said, after attending the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) International Johor Horse Show 2012, which was declared open by Tunku Temenggong Johor, Tunku Idris Iskandar Sultan Ibrahim, here yesterday.

Also present was UTM pro-chancellor Tan Sri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor.

The opening ceremony had to be re-located to the UTM Senate Hall from the Equine Centre, due to strong winds and rain which had hit Johor Baru in the afternoon.

The show jumping category for the Sultan Ibrahim trophy, which was initially scheduled to start at 2.30pm had to be delayed to 5pm because of the rain.

The event, held for the fifth time this year, attracted 156 riders, with 60 riders participating in endurance races.

The event, which offers prizes worth RM90,000, has been divided into three categories — dressage, showjumping and endurance.

It offered two titles up for grabs, the Sultan Ibrahim trophy for the higher category, and the Tengku Mahkota trophy for the lower category.