

# Dr M: Focus on healthy lifestyle strategies

By Manan Osman

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. There is a need to focus on healthy lifestyle strategies to prevent the wasting of a prime workforce to heart and other diseases as well as AIDS, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that in Malaysia, the disease pattern seemed to indicate that younger people of the critical group in the nation's workforce were falling prey to the so-called "lifestyle diseases".

Therefore, he said, Malaysia had embarked on intensive campaigns to change the lifestyles of its people.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the opening of the 45th session of World Health Organisation Regional Committee for the Western Pacific at the Crown Princess Hotel.

He said that although in general there had been a great deal of improvement in the health status of Malaysians, changes had taken place in the pattern of diseases and the population affected by them.

"Heart and pulmonary diseases have become the principal causes of death from 1980 onwards, replacing the diseases of early infancy.

"Cerebrovascular diseases were the third commonest cause of death in 1992, with accidents ranking fifth. Heart attacks are a major cause of premature death among males between 45 and 61 years with a dramatic rise in the age group between 30 and 44 years.

"Therefore, this pattern seems to show that the younger ones of the critical group in our workforce are falling prey to the so-called "lifestyle diseases".

(Cerebrovascular diseases, commonly called strokes or apoplexy, are the result of a more or less abrupt interruption of blood supply to some areas of the brain).

Dr Mahathir said that in an attempt to resolve the effects of this change in epidemiological pattern, Malaysia had embarked on intensive campaigns to change the people's lifestyles.

At the same time, he said, Malaysia had strengthened the health education process with legal enforcement in relevant areas such as the anti-smoking campaign which had received tremendous public support.

He said that although priorities for health action might differ in different regions and in different countries, there was a need to address the important issues of safe water, sanitation, waste management, education, housing, recreational facilities and others that could contribute towards better health.

He said this would result in a healthier community and a healthier workforce which were of economic importance to the country.

He said addressing these issues would also result in greater equity not only in national development but also in health.

Therefore, he said, it was important for countries to

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