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Alarming spread of AIDS in region

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The South and Southeast Asia are expected to record the highest number of adults and children infected with AIDS, overtaking Africa in no time at all, Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said yesterday.

"Six million adults and children are living with AIDS in South and South-East Asia as of December this year, the second highest figure in the world after Sub-Saharan Africa with 20.8 million affected adults and children.

"What is alarming is that the AIDS epidemic started in Africa about the late 70s, whereas South and Southeast Asia only experienced it in the late 80s.

"Furthermore, World Health Organisation statistics show that 16,000 new HIV infections were recorded this year, a staggering increase from the 7,500 recorded last year.

"This means that South and Southeast Asia will be overtaking Africa in no time at all and this crisis needs to be looked into immediately," she said.

She was addressing a forum on 'Lawyers, Sex and HIV/AIDS', organised by the Malaysian AIDS Council and Malaysian AIDS Foundation in conjunction with the Bar Council.

A panelist Dr Violet How expressed concern about the Education Ministry's policy towards sex education in schools.

"At present the ministry is only prepared to offer this subject as part of the Science subject or moral or Islamic studies.

"What is the purpose of hiding such a crucial issue under these areas?" she questioned.

Lawyer M. Puravelan said until today there had yet to be a study on the laws affecting the marginalised community, particularly the gay community.

"As lawyers, we have to identify and address laws which discriminate against homosexuals and lesbians," he said.

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