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Mahathir-Hygiene

PRIME MINISTER WANTS MALAYSIANS TO BE HYGIENIC

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Malaysians, especially food handlers, to be hygienic so that the health standard of the country would not be marred during the Commonwealth Games here next year.

"We must continue to be vigilant and ensure that no athlete or visitors to Malaysia comes down with (Hepatitis A) from now as it will cast a poor image of health standards in this country," the Prime Minister said.

Speaking at a charity dinner in conjunction with the launching of Malaysian Liver Foundation (MLF) here tonight, Dr Mahathir said food handlers should be absolutely clean when they prepared food.

The foundation, which was registered last year, is a non-profit charitable organisation dedicated to educating the Malaysian public on liver diseases, especially hepatitis and liver cancer.

Dr Mahathir is the patron of the foundation.

A medical doctor himself, Dr Mahathir said the Hepatitis A disease could be contracted by eating food or drinking water which had been contaminated with the virus.

"The rest of us can help in this crusade by avoiding raw or inadequately cooked shellfish, raw salads and vegetables, untreated drinking water, ice cubes and unpasteurised milk and by maintaining a high standard of personal hygiene," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the hepatitis, a form of liver disease, was a problem in Malaysia although the overall incidence appeared to be decreasing with the total number of cases reported in government hospitals -- 2,450 in 1992 to 1,581 last year.

He said the reported incidence of Hepatitis A in the country had decreased over the years with the improvement in sanitation, water supply and personal hygiene.

In the case of Hepatitis B, although the incidence in Malaysia had declined over the years, he said it was still regarded as the most important cause for primary liver cancer in the region.

Dr Mahathir said primary liver cancer, one of the 10 ten cancers reported among Malaysian males, could be cured if discovered early. However, up to 80 per cent of patients with liver cancer in the country are presented too late for curative treatment mainly because it is difficult to detect in the early stages.

He said the foundation, hopeful that the disease could be curbed, was established for reasons such as to increase public awareness on the early symptoms and the diagnostic facilities and treatment available.

Dr Mahathir said there were at least 2,000 new cases of end-stage liver disease each year in Malaysia, of which 10 per cent required a liver transplant.

Liver transplantation is the only solution for end-stage liver disease.

The Prime Minister said that as organ donation was rather slow in Malaysia, the foundation should join forces with the Health Ministry and other relevant organisations to embark on an active public education on organ donation nationwide.

Dr Mahathir said by working closely with people suffering from liver disease, their families and friends, health professionals, medical practitioners and researchers, the foundation would succeed in enhancing the standards of care, garnering public support and improving the quality

of treatment for the disease.

He said to make a greater impact in the region, there was a need to invest in basic and clinical research, adding that "research offers hope for the future and the possibility of prevention, better treatment and cure of liver disease."

At the dinner, some RM2 million was raised by the foundation.

Also present were the prime minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Ali and Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng. -- BERNAMA

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