

29/08/1997

Unfair to blame it on bohsia

Marina Mahathir

WITH reference to the article "Bohsia Girls Likely To Spread HIV/AIDS" (NST, Aug 24), I would like to point out that this is a distortion of the facts.

All over the world, girls are being infected at twice the rate of boys for the simple reason that they are being seduced by older and more experienced men. These men also frequent sex workers and are responsible for spreading HIV to all these women, regardless of their labels.

It is incorrect, therefore, to "warn" the public to be cautious about bohsia girls because this unfairly labels them as vectors of transmission when in fact it is they who are the victims.

Women are far too often blamed for the spread of HIV when it is they who suffer most from the impact of the epidemic, whether they are infected or not.

Sex workers, and now bohsia girls, are blamed for spreading the virus and the fact that they themselves were originally infected by men is forgotten.

Similarly, I was disappointed to hear over the radio of a talk by a doctor regarding antenatal HIV screening where he ignores the fact that most women who get infected with HIV received it from their husbands. Once a woman is detected with HIV, there is no law requiring her husband to be tested. He can be asked to come and be counselled to have a test, but if he refuses to come in at all to see the doctor, there is little anyone can do about that.

His infected wife faces the shame of not only finding out she's HIV-positive but also the possibility of being divorced because of that fact. In the fight against HIV, we need to get our facts right. It is easy to blame one helpless group or another while ignoring the larger issues involved.

The virus depends on our ignorance and our prejudices. Let us not help it survive because we refuse to see the truth.

(END)