

02/12/1998

AIDS: Media has big role in prevention

Patvinder Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called upon the media to make full use of its power to disseminate information on the prevention of AIDS to as many people as possible.

In an emotional speech, he said this was the information age, and in this time there was no information that was as important as the prevention of AIDS.

The Prime Minister hoped that the media would realise the important role it could play in helping to prevent a disease that was "totally unnecessary" and which could actually be totally preventable.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the presentation of the Red Ribbon Media Awards at the Dorsett Regency hotel at Jalan Imbi here. The ceremony, organised by the Malaysian Aids Foundation, was held in conjunction with World Aids Day today.

Dr Mahathir said while there were simple ways to prevent the spread of AIDS, there were those who did not know enough about them to prevent the spread of the disease.

"I do hope the media will appreciate these awards and use its power in order to help do something that is truly charitable and good," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that it was most unfortunate that AIDS spread due to ignorance.

In a voice choked with emotion, he added: "If people know ... if people know about AIDS. Education plays a very big role and this is where the media comes in. I am glad that we have these media awards because the role that can be played by the media cannot be measured."

Dr Mahathir said when he was studying medicine he was amazed at the thousands of diseases that could assail human beings.

"There are so many ways that we can be unhealthy. There are so many ways that we can actually die through these thousands of diseases. And I thought we had discovered all of them," he said, adding that he thought there were no more new disease to discover and that as long as some remedy for the diseases could be found people would be safe and live a longer life.

"When it was first discovered, it was discovered probably in the wrong country, in a developed country, whereas AIDS had probably been in developing countries for a much longer time," Dr Mahathir said.

He said because the focus was not on the developing countries and their health problems, AIDS was not noticed much and it was not realised that the disease had probably been around for quite some time.

"But when it affects people in developed countries there was a sudden fear that it is going to wipe out a lot of people who otherwise would have healthy lives.

"And so the world came to know about AIDS only to discover that AIDS had been around elsewhere but had not spread to developed countries," Dr Mahathir said.

He said today AIDS affected the whole world and that according to statistics 16,000 people would be infected with AIDS/HIV every day.

"That adds up to quite a lot of people who would be getting AIDS in their lifetime.

"Of course, we have the problems with the different cultures which somehow or other act against the prevention of AIDS and we see in certain cultures where the wives will not deny the rights of their husbands,

etcetra," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said in closing that those who won the awards really deserved them.

(END)