

PM wants probe on tainted blood case

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'It should not have happened if procedures carried out'

By TOH AN NEE

PETALING JAYA, Tues: The case of a woman administered with HIV contaminated blood should not have happened if the process was carried out through established procedures.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who said this, added that thorough investigation should be carried out to prevent a recurrence.

"I am so sad this has happened. I feel the government should investigate the matter so that it will not recur," he said after launching the national level Teachers Day celebrations in Ipoh today.

Tonight, acting Health Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn, who will brief the Cabinet at its weekly meeting tomorrow, received a final report on the incident. Fong said he had earlier been given the Health Ministry's preliminary report containing findings of the Jitra Hospital inquiry.

In the case, a 47-year-old housewife being treated at the hospital for menstrual problem received a blood transfusion in which one of the two pints used was contaminated with HIV.

Blood samples from both the victim and donor had been sent to the Institute for Medical Research in Kuala Lumpur for further tests and the results are expected to be ready this week.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Abu Bakar Suleiman told

the Sun today an independent investigation team will start an inquiry into the case at Jitra hospital tomorrow.

The team, comprising officers from Kuala Lumpur Hospital and the national blood services centre, is expected to come up with its report as soon as possible, he said.

Abu Bakar said the ministry has put in place very stringent blood screening procedures, which every public hospital has to abide by, to ensure safety. Private hospitals are also expected to use the same procedures.

"The system has been there for some time and we have been spending a lot on the screening. In this case, we want to know where the breakdown occurred," he said.

Asked about people using blood banks as testing sites for HIV, he said the ministry has been aware of this.

"That is why we have been advising the public to come to us and do proper testing if they think they are infected. By donating blood, it will increase the risk of infection to others."

In 1998, the national blood services centre revealed that 4.1% or 119,971 bags of infected blood were destroyed out of 288,381 bags collected in 1997, compared with 3.87% or 10,342 out of 266,804 in 1996.

They were tested positive for HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, syphilis, and also those which showed peculiar results.