

19/05/2000

Hard for family to accept apology

Sharanjit Singh; Elizabeth John

JITRA, Thurs. - The family of Bashah Mustaffa, who was given a HIV-contaminated blood transfusion, finds it difficult to accept the Government's apology for the tragic incident.

Bashah's husband, Halim Hamid, 45, said his family was devastated and no amount of condolence and expression of sympathy could undo what had happened to his wife.

"It's not like she was involved in a car crash where there is a possibility of her recovering.

"I would have forgiven those who apologised if this was the case but it isn't. I love my wife very much and she is now facing premature death because of someone's mistake."

Halim said his wife had literally been handed the death sentence and was now just waiting to die.

He said the reality was only beginning to dawn on his family and they faced constant mental and emotional trauma.

"My children constantly break down and cry when they think about how their mother is suffering," he said.

"We are heartbroken, but we will be there to support her in this difficult time," he added.

The couple has four children, aged between 12 and 21.

Bashah, however, could not be interviewed as she was too exhausted and needed to rest.

Having to take 15 pills a day, she was said to be always vomiting over the last few days.

It was reported today that the Cabinet apologised to the 47-year-old housewife and expressed regret over what happened to her.

Acting Health Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn, who is Human Resources Minister, was quoted as saying the incident should not have happened if standard operating procedures were adhered to.

He said the health authorities would extend assistance to the woman and her family.

Bashah and her family have filed a RM100 million suit against the Jitra Hospital.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian AIDS Council today expressed concern over the lack of sensitivity and respect for the victim.

Its president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said in a statement that the council was also concerned for the family following the media's disclosure of her identity.

"The council is concerned over the general breaches of confidentiality.

"Furthermore, it is obvious that reporters have been given access to the alleged donor.

"This may result in the donor being considered as the perpetrator of a crime when in fact, the incident resulted from a flawed system," she added.

(END)