

# Educating couples about AIDS

By DALILAH IBRAHIM

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian AIDS Council will distribute flyers to people in Johor, especially Muslim couples planning to get married, to provide them with more information on HIV/AIDS.

The flyer contains a catchy phrase *Adakah anda bakal pengantin? Anda perlu menjalani ujian HIV* (Are you a future bride and bridegroom? You have to take the HIV test) and the council's hotline number 1-800-88-183X.

Its president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said since Johor had made it compulsory for future couples to undergo the test, those interested to know more or have any question on the subject could contact the council.

Johor recently implement-

ed a ruling that all Muslim couples in the state should undergo HIV/AIDS test before marrying.

Although the council was against mandatory tests of HIV/AIDS, it could not stop the state from implementing the ruling. Marina told a press briefing entitled "Testing is Not Prevention" which was attended by representative of the World Health Organisation Dr U.H. Susantha de Silva, chairman of the Malaysian Medical Association's AIDS Action Committee chairman Dr Christopher Lee and MMA's Ethics Committee member Dr Choong Kuo Shiang.

Marina said even if tests came out negative, the couple would still need to be counselled because it did not mean that they would never face the risk of getting

infected. She added that the ruling would also impose undue stress on the couple and their families.

She also said that the council has proposed a module on HIV/AIDS to be incorporated into the pre-marriage courses, which was now compulsory for Muslim couples nationwide.

"Prevention is a personal responsibility and only if the person understands the risks involved that he or she could prevent getting or spreading the disease," she added.

Speaking from WHO's perspective, Dr de Silva said a person should not have to establish their HIV status to get access to their rights to marry.

"The benefits (of the test) must outweigh the harm and must be ethically justified," he said.