

07/04/2001

Dr Mahathir to launch local tooth amalgam

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will launch a made-in-Malaysia tooth amalgam that has taken the international dental world by storm on Thursday.

The ceremony at the Bukit Jalil Technology Park will signal the coming of age of Malaysian dental technology.

It will also mean the culmination of nearly 17 years of research into a safe tooth amalgam by dental surgeon Dr S. Radhakrishnan.

The 53-year-old left his booming practise in the early 1980s to find a tooth amalgam that will give peace of mind to patients afraid of mercury poisoning from their filling.

He developed "Silverfil" in 1989 but financial constraints prevented him putting it on the market.

The delay was not all bad for the Teluk Intan-born as it allowed him to obtain international patents on the product besides additional research to refine it.

"It is my dream and goal to replace conventional amalgams with Silverfil," he told the New Straits Times.

Dr Radhakrishnan's product assures that free mercury - released in vapour from fillings when patients chew or consume hot food or liquid - is never a problem.

This is possible as the Silverfil powder absorbs any free mercury within 15 minutes or so after coming into contact.

"This due to its high co-efficient of diffusion.

"Silverfill, thus, combines with mercury rapidly, a feature not seen in other amalgams," he said.

Mercury, one of the most toxic non-radioactive metals, makes up more than half of the amalgam.

Researchers believe that years after filling a tooth, trace amounts of mercury continue to be released in the form of vapour.

The amounts are triggered by chewing or heat.

Silverfil amalgam sets quickly and unlike others, reaction among the metals ends after four to six hours, or at worst, half a day.

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