

23 FEB 2001

Marina-AIDS

HOSPICE FOR AIDS PATIENTS TO OPEN THIS YEAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- Thanks to the Japanese embassy here, terminally ill AIDS patients in the country will finally get better care when Malaysia's first hospice for the disease opens in the middle of this year.

Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) president, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the RM314,333 grant from the embassy had enabled the long-awaited Hospis Cahaya to become a reality.

"We have been trying to establish Hospis Cahaya for the past five years and our main problem was to find a place to set up the establishment because we also had to face resistance from the local community," she told a news conference at the signing of the grant contract here.

The embassy was represented by its Charge d'Affaires, Masafumi Kuroki.

Marina said the hospice would provide home care for terminally ill AIDS patients who were abandoned by their families.

"There are many cases where the patients were rejected by their families and with no place to go, they end up taking up hospital beds even though there isn't much the hospitals can do for them.

"Hospis Cahaya will identify these patients via the doctors and take them in and provide home care so that they can live in dignity," she said.

To a question, Marina said the hospice, with 17 well-trained staff, could accommodate seven to eight patients at any one time.

Up to December last year, the Health Ministry reported had that there were more than 38,000 HIV/AIDS patients in the country.

Marina said statistics for the past few years had shown a rising trend in the number with 3,000 to 4,000 new cases reported every year.

Kuroki said the grant was for the construction of the hospice as well as for buying medical equipment.

"This is the first grant we are extending to HIV/AIDS NGOs (non-governmental organisations) in Malaysia but we have extended similar grants to other countries such as Thailand for similar projects," he said.

Kuroki said the Japanese government had made HIV/AIDS one of the top priority areas under the Global Issue Initiative (GII) through which it provides help and grants for countries to implement HIV/AIDS programmes.

"In 1994 the government established the GII and for the past seven years the GII has spent more than US\$3 billion (RM11.4 billion) for the HIV/AIDS cause throughout the world," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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