

# ***Insufficient data foiling efforts to prevent AIDS***

STAR 31 MAY 2002

By **AUDREY EDWARDS**

KUALA LUMPUR: The failure to translate raw data and statistics collected on HIV/AIDS into useful information has rendered prevention programmes ineffective.

Malaysian AIDS Foundation chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir lamented that while the Health Ministry collected "numbers," no analysis had been carried out so far.

"If we don't analyse, we won't know why all these people get infected. If we don't know why, how can we design prevention programmes?" she questioned.

One of the problems, she added, was that no accurate data was available on how Malaysians were exposed to HIV/AIDS to help the country combat the problem.

Citing an example, she said while data showed that the number of women being infected with the virus was rising, no reasons were given for the increase.

Marina also said the constant rise in the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS was because prevention programmes had yet to show their effectiveness.

About 6,000 new cases were diagnosed last year and she said this rate could continue to increase this year.

Some of the problems in carrying out prevention programmes throughout the country were the lack of finance and human resources, she pointed out.

Asked if there was any attempt to translate the data into useful information, Marina said that the foundation had formed a partnership with the Women and Family Development Ministry to do so.

"We need to look at all this (data) to see how women are vulnerable and what we can do with them," she told reporters yesterday after launching "The Biggest Red Ribbon in Malaysia," organised by Pengasih Malaysia with the sup-

port of the foundation at Rumah Pengasih.

The campaign was held in conjunction with International Memorial AIDS Day.

Marina was the last person to sign the ribbon, which bore 2,500 signatures from the public.

She also said that a recent discussion with Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad to include the HIV/AIDS topic in school curriculum had been positive and the first step was to train the teachers on the syllabus.

On the feasibility of producing generic drugs for HIV/AIDS patients in the country, she said that government intervention was still needed to create a willingness among local drug manufacturers to produce it.

"If the Government says it is going to buy (the drugs), because most it is after all, going to be dispensed through the Government, then I think manufacturers would be more keen," she said.