

05 OCT 2002  
Mahathir-HIV

DR M: GOVT TO MAKE AVAILABLE HIV MEDICINE TO THE POOREST OF THE POOR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 (Bernama) -- The government is looking at all possibilities to make medicines for HIV patients available to the poorest of the poor, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

This involved negotiating with pharmaceutical companies to reduce prices, to invoking rights to compulsory licensing and parallel importing, he said at the Red Ribbon Gala (AIDS) 2002 at a leading hotel here.

"Some people may not like what we are doing, saying the country is not respecting intellectual rights, but it has to be done because people's lives are more important than huge profits for already rich companies," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was happy that all over the developing world, the governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had stood side-by-side to advocate for fairness in the issue of drug pricing so that the large majority in the world's HIV-infected people would have access to treatments.

Dr Mahathir said treatments for HIV/AIDS patients were becoming increasingly serious and an urgent issue because with 40 million people infected with HIV, the impact on countries of their illness and deaths would be devastating.

He said this year's theme for the World AIDS campaign "Stigma and Discrimination" was necessary as it was an indictment of humankind because such attitudes were the result of ignorance, fear and denial.

"I've been told that in Malaysia, these attitudes still exist and result in people with HIV/AIDS being thrown out of work, HIV-positive babies being refused shelter and some people being denied treatment or neglected.

"IN our hopes to build a caring society by 2020, we need to examine such negative attitudes and make every effort to accept those who are infected with the disease as some of them may have it due to unexpected circumstances.

"We must understand that such prejudices say more about ourselves than about those we discriminate against," he said.

At the ceremony, Dr Mahathir's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali was honoured to present the Dr Siti Hasmah Award to Michael Chow, a social activist, for his contributions to the AIDS response in Malaysia.

-- BERNAMA  
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