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Dr M to launch World Sight Day 2002 at KLCC Park

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will launch World Sight Day 2002 next Friday, an event aimed at raising awareness on how millions of people around the world are unaware of preventable eye disorders.

The annual event is organised by the Health Ministry, the Association of Malaysian Optometrists and National Council for the Blind, Malaysia and initiated by the World Health Organisation.

Organising co-chairman Dr Mariam Ismail said the event would focus on the problem of global blindness and the initiative to address it through VISION 2020: The Right To Sight, which aims to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020.

"The event is very significant because the country's Wawasan 2020 is similar to our programme which focuses on the initiative towards a good life, health and vision," she said today.

The one-day event will be launched at KLCC Park, where many activities for participants have been planned such as a "Fun Walk for Sight", an exhibition on eye care and eye diseases and colouring and essay competitions for children.

The Fun Walk, said Dr Mariam, will involve members of the public walking and interacting with the blind.

"There will also be free T-shirts, food, goodies, informative brochures and pamphlets for participants. They can also get their eyes checked for free on that day," she said, adding that diabetic patients could also get their eyes specially tested.

She said response to the event had not been too good, with only 800 out of a targetted 3,000 people registering for the event.

"It falls on a working day but we are really hoping senior citizens, housewives or those not working on that day will come," she added.

Around 20 doctors will be available to advise and conduct eye-tests, as well as a strong showing from non-governmental agencies, private companies and pharmaceutical companies involved in eye-care.

She said based on the National Eye Survey in 1996, three out of 1,000 Malaysians were blind, an estimated 50,000 were bilaterally blind and around 500,000 had low vision.

Major causes of blindness and low vision are cataract, retinal diseases including age related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy, and uncorrected refractive error.