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Raising RM2m to fight AIDS

Shamini Darshni

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) launched a campaign today to raise RM2 million to help fight AIDS through greater public awareness.

The 10-month drive, themed In the Name of Love: A Fund-Raising Campaign for AIDS, will see two events being held next month.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali will be the guests of honour at the Red Ribbon Gala 2002 dinner at Shangri-la Hotel here on Oct 5.

Foundation chairman Datuk Marina Mahathir said at a Press conference the dinner would feature five Asia-Pacific chefs who have agreed to donate the ingredients for their respective creations.

Dr Siti Hasmah will also be presenting the Dr Siti Hasmah Award 2002, an honour given to an exemplary individual or organisation working in areas relating to HIV or AIDS.

The Vienna Boys Choir will perform modern classics like Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Somewhere Out There and Singing in the Rain.

The next day, the choir will perform a two-hour repertoire ranging from the Romantic Period to the Modern Classics at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas from 8.30pm to 10.30pm.

Marina said those wanting more information could call 03-20517007.

"Funds are not sufficient. We need to ensure a regular cash flow if we are going to create awareness among Malaysians," she said.

The Press conference saw Hong Leong Foundation director Datuk Roger Tan presenting a cheque for RM100,000 to Marina to sponsor the concert. Co-sponsoring the event is Petronas.

On AIDS, Marina said one of the main reasons for the increase in AIDS patients nationwide was greater promiscuity among women, including sex with men infected with the disease.

"The epidemic is spreading. What we have seen in recent years is the continuing rise of people infected and living with AIDS," she said.

According to Health Ministry statistics, in 1986 there were only three HIV and AIDS cases in the country. Last year, the figure had reached 5,868.

"Seventy per cent of people with AIDS are drug users who get infected through shared needles," she said, adding that was why the AIDS issue remained a serious and urgent one.

"In the case of the others, it is mainly due to their sexual behaviour," she said.

In Western countries, women were four times more likely to contract HIV through vaginal sex with infected males than vice-versa.

Marina, who is also Malaysian AIDS Council president, said the authorities were moving towards reducing the cost of medicines used in treating AIDS patients.

"More effort needs to be undertaken, particularly through explaining to people how they can protect themselves from the disease," she added.