

18 JUN 2003

Mahathir-WHO

WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL CALLS ON DR MAHATHIR

PUTRAJAYA, June 18 (Bernama) -- World Health Organisation (WHO) director-general Gro Harlem Bruntland called on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Prime Minister's Department here today.

She was accompanied to the meeting by Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng and WHO regional director for Western Pacific Dr Shigeru Omi.

Bruntland is here for the two-day WHO Global Conference on SARS in Petaling Jaya which ends today.

When met by reporters later, Bruntland said that her discussion with Dr Mahathir touched, among others, on the need for greater collaboration among countries to deal with the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome killer disease.

She described the conference as successful and thanked the Malaysian government for hosting the event.

"After 100 days since the global alert came out, we are now in a situation where we are much more optimistic that the outbreak is gone in many countries and is coming down in other countries," she said.

She said that the reduction in the number of cases had led the WHO to feel "reasonably confident that we can see the end of this first major outbreak of a new disease in this century."

She also described the meeting as a very important one in public health history.

She said that all conference documents would be put on the website to enable easy access by those involved in the fight against SARS, which has killed nearly 800 and infected more than 9,000 people worldwide.

Meanwhile, Chua said that the Health Ministry was preparing a module of checklist as a preparation in facing new outbreaks.

"I have assured Dr Mahathir that the ministry is doing a module including the checklist so that we are ready when facing future outbreaks. The Prime Minister is convinced that there will be new outbreaks after this. It may be from bio-terrorism, or dangerous viruses escaping due to bad handling in laboratories that could cause damage and danger to the community.

"Therefore it is important that we have an international collaboration and working with the WHO, and it is important for Malaysia to be fully equipped," he added.

-- BERNAMA

SHI MAM RM