

15 JUN 2003

SARS-Conference

WHO SARS CONFERENCE A FOLLOW UP TO CAMBODIA MEET

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KUALA LUMPUR, June 15 (Bernama) -- The World Health Organisation's (WHO) first Global Conference on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) starting here Tuesday is a follow up to the Asean Health Ministers' special meeting on SARS which ended in Cambodia on June 11.

The WHO Global Conference on SARS, to be held at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel on June 17 and 18, is being held to review the scientific findings on the killer disease which to-date, has claimed more than 790 lives and infected some 8,500 people worldwide.

WHO, in its website, revealed that the Global Conference on SARS would also be used to examine the public health interventions to contain the disease at its early stage nearly four months ago.

It should be noted that the Asean Health Ministers Special Meeting on SARS in Cambodia declared that the Asean region was SARS free and agreed to embark on a joint action plan to stop the spread of the deadly disease.

This conference is expected to take things a step further by concluding the reasons for its outbreak and how it could have been contained without risking too many lives.

The WHO Global Conference on SARS will also be a precursor to the Special APEC senior officials meeting and the APEC Health Ministers Meeting on SARS. Both the meetings would be held on June 27 and June 28, respectively, in Bangkok, Thailand.

Participants to the WHO Global Conference on SARS would include some 1,300 scientists, key health professionals, public and private healthcare practitioners, leading experts on the deadly coronavirus, found to be the primary cause of SARS, and nearly 500 journalists.

"The participants will be looking at the epidemiological picture, clinical management and laboratory findings as the basis for a global containment strategy," Health Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Alias Ali said recently.

He said various topics would be discussed at the Global Conference on SARS such as the global response for SARS and the national responses by various countries namely Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Canada and the United States (US).

There will also be discussions on reducing transmission in healthcare settings, environmental health, effective communication, reducing community transmission, preventing international spread, epidemiology, laboratory issues, clinical diagnosis and the possible role of animals in spreading the fatal disease.

Among the top guns of WHO who would be attending the conference are the organisation's Western Pacific regional director Dr Shigeru Omi and WHO director general Gro Harlem Brundtland.

Both have been scheduled to hold discussions with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"It was originally to be hosted at Geneva, where the WHO is based but they decided to choose Malaysia in recognition for our efforts in effectively fighting the disease," Alias said.

The plenary session on SARS on the first day of the conference would touch on the global impact caused by SARS, the global alert and response. It would also hear a 15-minute presentation each from Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Canada and the US on their response to SARS.

In the afternoon, the plenary session would discuss the aspect of

aetiology, laboratory diagnosis, possible role of animals in SARS, vaccine development as well as clinical diagnosis and management.

The second day, would be devoted to technical matters like preventing international spread, epidemiology, laboratory issues, clinical diagnosis and management, possible role of animals, response coordination and surveillance.

Alias also said as host, several programmes had been arranged for the participants to the conference and they included dinners, cultural performances and sightseeing tours.

He also said a publicity blitz was carried out by the Foreign Ministry, Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry as well as the Information Ministry to create public awareness on the conference.

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