

# Doctor: Exempt no one from vaccination

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BY LISA GOH

**SERDANG:** All visitors from endemic disease areas, including diplomats and politicians, should be subject to the pre-entry condition on vaccination, said renowned virologist Datuk Prof Dr Lam Sai Kit.

Dr Lam, who is president of the Asia Pacific Society for Medical Virology, said if there were people who were allowed to enter a country without evidence of vaccination, it could lead to the spread of diseases in the region.

"Public health measures are there, but the problem is politics.

"If people can come into the country without evidence of proper vaccination, what is there to stop an endemic disease from coming into our country?" he said during a question-and-answer session at a public lecture on *Emerging Mosquito-Borne and Zoonotic Diseases: A Personal Perspective* at Universiti Putra Malaysia yesterday.

The lecture was given by Professor John S. Mackenzie, who is here to receive the Akademi Sains Malaysia Award for Scientific Excellence in Honour of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday.

Prof Mackenzie is the Premier's Fellow and Professor of Tropical and Emerging Infectious Diseases in the division of health sciences, Curtin University of Technology, Australia.

He concurred with Dr Lam's views, saying that everyone should abide by the same rules, and that the rules should not be bent for some people because

viruses "do not see titles, or distinguish between people."

On the level of development of science in Malaysia, Dr Lam said many young science graduates today did not find traditional virology interesting and were more interested in molecular biology.

"I understand that molecular biology is the trend now, but traditional virology is still very important and should not be overlooked as viruses need to be isolated first before they can be studied by molecular biologists.

"And that is the importance of virology," he said.

Dr Lam said there was a need to have a Bio-containment Level Four (BL4) laboratory in an Asian country as so many of the emerging diseases were from this region, like Japanese Encephalitis and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, as well as the Nipah virus.

"We have the expertise to study these diseases but due to the lack of infrastructure, we often have to call upon developed countries to help and therefore we can't conduct the

studies ourselves.

"We should be fighting our diseases and controlling them where they happen. If that can be done then perhaps many diseases can be controlled from the start," he said.

He suggested that Asian countries work together to set up the laboratory since it could cost some US\$300mil (RM1.1bil).

A BL4 laboratory has the highest level of security.

It uses negative pressure and workers are required to wear "spacesuits."