

Health Ministry opens crisis centre

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It will address issues during epidemics and disasters

PUTRAJAYA: The Health Ministry has opened a centre to coordinate efforts to address health issues during epidemics, crises and disasters.

The Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC) will collaborate and maintain a communications network with local as well as foreign organisations and institutes.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek said the centre would help the ministry strengthen its disaster and crisis management capabilities in tackling health and rehabilitation issues.

He said the CPRC had played an important role in collecting and disseminating information during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) scare.

"The effective coordination and dissemination of information through this centre had prevented local transmission of SARS," he added.

However, there were small hiccups during the launch yesterday, causing Dr Chua to take a swipe at the country's broadband connection.

"The Malaysian lines need upgrading," he told reporters when a teleconference with state health directors was disrupted by intermittent connection.

The Terengganu state health director, who was briefing Dr

Chua on a case, could hardly be heard.

"Linking (to the states) is not a problem but the line is a problem.

"As you have seen, when it is congested you cannot hear.

"Maybe (Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim) Keng Yaik will not be happy," he said.

The RM2mil CPRC, under the disease control director, is equipped with four computers, six LCD monitors, Internet access, and two hotlines as well as facsimile and TV satellite facilities to obtain up-to-date reports on a crisis or disaster.

It can be activated based on several criteria, such as when a disease breaks out in more than one state.

It can also be activated when there is a crisis or disaster with high morbidity or mortality rate, or those occurring in a cluster manner or extraordinary incidences caused by an infectious disease with unknown pathogen.

Others are situations involving extraordinary events in other countries, large-scale disasters, whether natural or man-made; bio-terrorism and Level Three disasters (complex or involving bigger areas or more than one country).

The centre's hotline number is 03-8881 0600.