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Bad news hits AIDS event

Disease-fighting community may have lost 100 colleagues

MELBOURNE: It was a sombre affair at the 20th International AIDS Conference in Melbourne as news broke that more than 100 of the participants may have perished on Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17.

Universiti Malaya dean of Medicine Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman, who is in Melbourne for the conference organised by International AIDS Society (IAS), said they were still gathering information on their colleagues who were on board the ill-fated plane.

"We still don't have confirmation of how many were actually heading here. We just heard that a number of them, especially from Amsterdam, were heading for this conference, including former IAS president Joeb Lange," she said in a phone interview with *The Star*.

The first time Dr Adeeba met Lange was when they co-wrote a chapter in a book several years ago.

"Through the course of our work, we sat on several committees together. His work has been in HIV treatment and prevention, particularly in developing countries," she said.

"He actually did a lot of work in Thailand, opening a successful HIV centre with two

other Australian professors in Bangkok."

Dr Adeeba added that another participant who may have been on the flight was HIV communications officer Glenn Thomas from the World Health Organisation.

She also extended her condolences to the families of those who lost their lives on MH17.

"But I just wish that, as a country, we take this as a time to really look at ourselves and come together – big and small – after so many tragedies. It's time that we heal together," she said.