

Headline **IMPOSSIBLY POSITIVE**
 Date **18 Mar 2010**
 MediaTitle **Malay Mail**
 Section **News**
 Journalist **N/A**
 Frequency **Daily**
 Circ / Read **20,816 / 49,000**

Language **English**
 Page No **12**
 Article Size **259 cm²**
 Color **Full Color**
 ADValue **2,152**
 PRValue **6,455**



IMPOSSIBLY POSITIVE

PETALING JAYA: Living with HIV and AIDS alone is tough, but to come out in the open, share your stories with strangers and risk being discriminated against?

As such, one has to commend the bravery of those to be featured in an upcoming play called *Life Sdn Bhd 5: I'm Positive!*, by the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) and The Actors Studio.

The stage drama that will unfold at the end of this month will showcase real-life stories of nine people who are either HIV-positive or affiliated with the disease through families and friends.

In an exclusive interview with *The Malay Mail* yesterday, three cast members shared their hopes, fears and expectations in taking centre-stage for the first time.

Norlela Mokhtar or Ella, a 46-year-old single mother of four, said all she wants is to be an advocate of HIV and AIDS education.

In the unscripted play, Taiping-born Ella hopes to tell her story from the heart.

"The main thing I want to tell people is not to discriminate against those with the disease. I've lost jobs, I was not allowed to eat in canteens and I even had my forks and spoons boiled by food operators after I used them," she said.

Ella contracted HIV from her second

husband and first learnt of her infection in 2000. At the time, her eldest child was only 15.

"It was tough when I had to break the news to my kids. I couldn't sit all of them together as their level of understanding differed. I had to wait several years before I could tell my second, third and fourth child."

She said even though her kids understood everything about the disease now, she knows it has not been easy for them to explain or defend her when others raised the issue.

"Despite my misfortune, in a way, I'm proud to be in a position where I'm able to help others understand what HIV and AIDS are all about," said Ella, who is now a Treatment, Care and Support executive with MAC.

For Bakhtiar Talhah, HIV-positive and living with the disease for more than 10 years, his part in the play is

to speak of the medication available for patients.

"The general perception about the disease is that HIV equals death. While that may be true in the long run, people don't realise that even if you're HIV-positive, you are still able to live a long, full and productive life, about as long as 40 years after being infected," Bakhtiar, a MAC executive director in his late

30s, said.

He will also talk about relationship issues in the play.

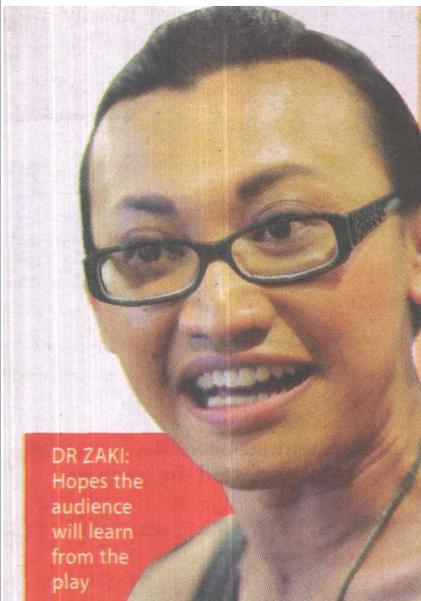
"How does an HIV-positive meet and date people? My experiences in this are both funny and sad, and in the end, it all boils down to whether a person is worth your precious time."

Dr Zaki Arzmi, a graduate of Gunma University School of Medicine in Japan, revealed little of her story, saying only that it is "explicit, yet told in a demure manner".

However, the 30-something transsexual, who is a monitoring and evaluation executive with MAC, is not HIV-positive.

"I wasn't sure about coming onstage to speak at first, as I only have about a year's experience dealing with HIV-positives. But I know a lot about discrimination and I hope to impart my experiences about that," she said.

On what she expects from the play, Dr Zaki said: "Just as long as one person from the crowd learns one thing from the show, I'll be pleased."



DR ZAKI: Hopes the audience will learn from the play