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17,000 TB cases reported in Malaysia last year

PUTRAJAYA: The number of tuberculosis (TB) cases in the country has increased annually, with 17,000 cases reported last year, Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said yesterday.

He said that of the total, 1,005 patients died and more than 85 per cent completed their treatment.

"We have reduced our cases from more than 100,000 cases (a year) earlier... and now, we are left with about 17,000 cases a year, but this is considered as still high. We can actually reduce it further.

"There is some increase...slight increase. At one time, we managed to reduce (the number to) very low but they've come up again," he told a press conference after chairing the second day of the 61st session of the World Health

Organisation (WHO) Regional Committee for the Western Pacific Region meeting at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre (PICC) here yesterday.

Liow said one of the contributing factors to the

increasing number of TB cases was the co-infection between TB and HIV.

He said multidrug-resistant TB was also one of the challenges for the government to reduce TB cases in the country, adding that the important thing in curing TB was to tackle the TB-HIV co-infection and effective treatment.

Liow said the crucial part in reducing the cases was tracking and following-up with the patient.

On the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) achievement for the country, the health minister said it had surpassed the target in all areas, such as MDG on HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality rates, child mortality rates, except TB cases. He said MDG on TB did not surpass the target because the number of cases was going up and down every year.

Meanwhile, Health Director-General Tan Sri Dr Mohd Ismail Merican said the detection of the cases, awareness and ensuring the patient complied with the treatment were crucial.