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Malaysia surpasses health targets

Only TB goal not met despite drop in number of cases

LOH FOON FONG
and **LIM WEY WEN**

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) achievement surpassed the targets in all areas except for tuberculosis.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said, however, the number of TB cases in the country had dwindled to the current level of 17,000 cases from 100,000 cases in the past.

On the average, some 1,500 patients die from the disease each year, he said at the 61st session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific here yesterday.

The United Nations' MDGs are the most broadly supported, comprehensive and specific development goals the world has agreed upon.

These eight time-bound goals provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty, include goals and targets on hunger,

maternal and child mortality and diseases.

Adopted by world leaders in 2000 and set to be achieved by 2015, the MDGs are both global and local, tailored by each country to suit specific development needs.

Meanwhile, the WHO report on Regional Strategic Plan for Tuberculosis Control 2011-2015 revealed that out of 4,433 TB-HIV co-infections, 1,296 died last year.

Liow said the ministry had been tracking down patients to make sure they complete their compulsory six-month treatment because, if they did not do that, patients might be re-infected as well as infect other people.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican said more than 85% of TB patients completed their treatment while 15% had either died or

moved to other places.

The meeting yesterday endorsed a regional strategy aimed at delivering timely and quality health services to all people in the Western Pacific region.

In another development, WHO has endorsed a new laboratory equipment that can diagnose multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) within 90 minutes instead of two months.

WHO Stop TB Western Pacific Regional Office adviser Dr Catharina van Weezenbeek said the simple device would be able to differentiate MDR-TB from the normal TB infection through genetic changes in the microbacterium.

"Until two years ago, it was difficult to diagnose MDR-TB but last week, WHO endorsed a new laboratory equipment, which is a revolution to TB control," she told *The Star*.

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Health talk: Liow chairing a meeting on the 2nd day of the 61st session of the WHO regional committee for the Western Pacific in Putrajaya yesterday. On his right is Dr Shin Young-soo, regional director for the WHO Western Pacific. — RAJA FAISAL HISHAN / The Star.