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Patient dies without surgery, family slams EPF

by Wong Wooi Kean
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GEORGE TOWN: All he needed was a simple letter of guarantee from the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) that his savings could be used to fund a life-saving operation.

But after being subjected to a bureaucratic runaround, hotel worker Ahmad Nazri Ibrahim, 48, succumbed to his chronic heart ailment without getting the surgery he needed.

His family is now asking why the EPF had dragged its feet, allowing his condition to deteriorate to the point of death on Tuesday at the Penang Hospital.

His brother, Roslin, 49, yesterday recounted how the family could not get a letter in time despite showing proof to the EPF that the medical case was genuine and the released funds would be used for the surgery.

"It was hard to even meet with any high-ranking officer in the EPF office who could have made a decision to help us," Roslin said at a press conference.

Ahmad Nazri was diagnosed with three cardiac blockages and faced difficulties raising RM19,000 for the surgery at the hospital.

Roslin said that the hospital informed the family to get a letter of guarantee from EPF stating that the money would be released from the accounts of Ahmad Nazri and his wife Roszita Ahmad, 47.

However, when the family approached EPF, the officers wanted to see the hospital bill first, he said.

Their repeated meetings with EPF resulted in them in being given the runaround, he said.

The EPF instead issued a letter of confirmation to the hospital showing the available funds for both Ahmad Nazri and Roszita.

However, the document was deemed not good enough by the hospital.

When the required letter was issued on Jan 15, about a month after the family first went to EPF, Ahmad Nazri's condition had deteriorated and his lungs were filled with water, forcing him to wait for invasive surgery.

However, he died four days later.

Penang Health, Welfare and Caring Society Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh, who was also present at the press conference, said he would ask the hospital to submit a report on the case.

"The EPF should also have a standard operating procedure to be effective in urgent cases like this," he said.

"An EPF officer should visit such cases to understand the actual situation instead of giving out mere words."

Bukit Bendera MP Liew Chin Tong said he would bring up the issue at the next Parliament meeting, to ask for procedural improvements to be made to ensure similar misfortune does not befall others.

EPF public relations general manager Nik Affendi Jaafar, when contacted said it was standard practice for the confirmation letter to be accepted by public and private hospitals without any problems, including the Penang Hospital.

"We sympathise with the family over Ahmad Nazri's death," he said.

"We went an extra mile to help him. We even visited the house to get his thumb print, and dealt directly with the supplier of the stents needed for his heart surgery."

He also said allegations that they were given the runaround were not true.

"Based on our investigation into the computerised administration system in George Town branch, Puan Roszita only had to wait four seconds to be attended to after she obtained her call number," he said.

Nik Affendi pointed out that Roszita was given the confirmation letter on Dec 23, that same day she had applied for it.

A hot-air balloon taking off during yesterday's launch of the second International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta to be held in March.



Hot air balloon fiesta is back

by Husna Yusop
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PUTRAJAYA: One of the most awaited events in Putrajaya, the International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta, is coming back for the second time this year.

To be held from March 18 to 21, it will feature 23 balloonists from several countries like Belgium, Switzerland, New Zealand, The Netherlands, United States, Japan and France, including woman pilot from Japan, Akari Sue.

Officiating the launch yesterday, Perbadanan Putrajaya president Tan Sri Samsudin Osman said echoing the success of the inaugural event last year, the spectators anticipated to attend the fiesta would double last year's 150,000 figure.

He said the beauty of Putrajaya would be magnified with the colourful hot air balloons, coming in various shapes, floating within the administrative capital.

"Majestically floating in the air, the hot air balloons draw the crowd regardless of their nationality, age or profession. It is very

apt with this year's event tagline "1World, 1Malaysia, 1Fiesta."

The balloons will take off at the Monumen Alaf Baru - located in Precinct 2, Putrajaya, by the edge of the Putrajaya Lake - and will fly at a height of not more than 3,077m (10,000 feet) and within 3km radius from the site.

There will be five hot air balloons to offer tethered rides for the public which would be available in two sessions a day - from 8am to 11am and 6pm to 9pm. Each person will be charged RM10 for a ride.

Other activities for the public include helicopter rides, water ball and sphere rides, colouring competition, photography competition, auto show and petting zoo.

Co-organised by the Malaysian Sport Aviation Federation and AKA Balloon Sdn Bhd, the four-day event will also showcase other flying events featuring para-motor, remote control planes and helicopters, aero models and professional kite flying.

The highlight will be on March 20 when the nightglow display will be held, followed by a fireworks display.

Mahathir: War against terror can't be won with weapons

KUALA LUMPUR: The war against terror, which the Western powers profess they are fighting, cannot be won with the sophisticated and costly weapons that are pouring out of the western industrial plants, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said such war essentially was a guerilla war and could only be won by winning the hearts and minds of the people.

"Guerilla wars cannot be won by armies, navies and air forces equipped with the most sophisticated destructive weapons. The world has not realised this yet.

The guerillas always win in the end," he said in his keynote address at the General Conference for the Support of Al-Quds here.

Citing the Vietnam war, the numerous wars of independence of the colonies and the ongoing crisis in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mahathir said governments might surrender but guerillas would fight on.

He said the mess that the world was in today had its origins in the western imperialism of the past when they had no compunction about drawing borders which divided people and changing demography by moving large numbers of people to occupy other people's land.

"If they choose to make every Muslim a terror suspect, they would have to accept that they have 1.6 billion enemies lurking in every corner of the world," he said.

But he said that if the Western powers chose to eliminate

the primary cause of the present violence and indiscriminate killings, then there was a good chance that the world would become secure again.

The former premier, who spoke at length on the history of the Palestine people's struggle, said one of the greatest injustices done was to take Palestinian land to give to the Jews to create the state of Israel.

In seizing the land of Palestinians to create a homeland for the Jews, the West had launched the longest and the biggest guerilla war of liberation, he said.

"The West has made a grievous mistake by doing this. It is continuing to perpetuate the mistake by supporting a state that is leery of international practices and laws," Mahathir said.

He said the world needed to take cognisance of the root cause and concern of the Palestinians' suffering.

"It is the misery of the people of Palestine who have been forced to live in primitive camps for the past six decades. It is the denial of their right of return to reclaim their lands in occupied Palestine."

He also said the world today was made to feel insecure because everyone must join in the war against terror.

"Billions of dollars are being spent to counter terrorism. Air travel in particular has been greatly affected with governments and airlines losing billions of dollars from the decline in air travel," he said.

At a news conference later, Mahathir expressed disappointment in US President Barack Obama because none of his election promises had been kept.

"He promised to get out of Afghanistan but he ended up sending more troops there instead. He promised to close down Guantanamo but he has not closed it down," he said.

- Bernama

Authorised centre for International Chinese Proficiency Test

PETALING JAYA: Dong Jiao Zong Higher Learning Centre Bhd will be the authorised test centre to administer and conduct the International Chinese Proficiency Test in Malaysia.

Launched and conducted worldwide by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) of Beijing, China, the proficiency test is expected to cope with the increasing demand from overseas, particularly in learning and mastering proper Chinese language.

The new standardised testing system was introduced this year to better assess the ability of Chinese language learners as well as to promote teaching and learning through examinations.

There are two types of proficiency tests, namely the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) and Young Learners Chinese Test (YCT).

In the new HSK test, there are six levels of assessment which include a writing test and three levels of oral test which candidates have to take. The YCT test, on the other hand, mainly targets non-Chinese native speakers in primary and secondary schools.

The HSK test is an international benchmark for the purposes of academic pursuit (for applying to study in China) and to meet living and working needs while the YCT test as a monitoring and assessment system for younger learners, encouraging them to advance to higher levels.

The HSK test will be held at Dong Jiao Zong Higher Learning Centre on April 17 and July 18; registration for the tests closes on March 15 and June 14 respectively.

For YCT tests on May 8 and Oct 30, registration closes on April 5 and Sept 27 respectively.

Details of the test structure, fees and registration forms are available on www.djz.edu.my/higherlearning. For more information, contact Dong Jiao Zong Higher Learning Centre Bhd at 03-8739 2770 (ext 140/432) or email djzhc@gmail.com.

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