

DAILY NEWS

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Dar gets modern AIDS lab

PRESIDENT Benjamin Mkapa yesterday launched an ultra-modern HIV/AIDS treatment centre and laboratories at the Muhimbili National Hospital (MNH), built under the initiative of the US-based Abbott Fund.

Health experts told the audience at the launch ceremony that the facilities, said to be the best in East Africa, have tremendously boosted the country's capacity to handle HIV/AIDS cases.

President Mkapa described the facilities as a big step forward in the fight against the scourge, which in 2000 declared it as a national disaster.

Mr Mkapa said under the Fund's initiative in fighting

By **JOHN KULEKANA**

HIV/AIDS, 35 million US dollars (about 40bn/-) has been invested in Tanzania, reflecting its trust and confidence in the country's efforts in taming the killer disease.

"Thank you for the support and partnership in the crusade against the pandemic," the president said shortly before inaugurating the facilities.

"Through our successful partnership with the Abbott Fund, we are providing Tanzanian health professionals with resources and tools to manage our healthcare system more effectively," he said.

"The new facilities will tremendously improve the care of people with HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases, benefiting up to 1,000 patients a day," said

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MNH Chief Executive Officer David Tregoning.

He said the facilities were the most modern in East Africa where over 1,000 tests can now be done within one hour.

Abbott CEO Miles White, who also attended the ceremony, said the initiative was primarily focused on improving Tanzania's health system to provide quality, lifelong care for patients with HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

He said although the initiative is centred at MNH, work was also under way at 82 additional hospitals and rural health centres across the country.

The sites covered after the programme was scaled up include referral, regional and district hospitals, as well as some health centres and dispensaries.

"More than 65,000 people have received voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) services due to improvements, where some rural communities were reached for the first time," he said.

"Key areas on focus include modernising facilities, training staff, improving hospital and patient management and expanding capacity for testing and treatment," he said.

He added that already 1,300 physicians, nurses and other health professionals have been trained in HIV-patient care, including testing, counselling and treatment.

The CEO said Abbott and Abbott Fund are investing

100 million US dollars (about 114bn/-) under a five-year plan to address HIV/AIDS in Africa and throughout developing world, where Tanzania is so far the leading recipient.

He said Axios, an organisation specialising in health management in developing countries, is serving as the implementing partner for the initiative.

Health Minister Anna Abdallah said in her speech that she regards the facilities as "a dream that has come true" in the government's effort to improve the health status of Tanzanians.

"I sincerely believe that many Tanzanians of all walks of life will be kept alive in this large and upgraded national hospital, for very many years to come," she said.

The minister, however, challenged MNH officials to make the hospital a model on how a national referral centre was supposed to be in terms of patients' care.

He commended President Mkapa for promoting campaigns against HIV/AIDS in the country.

"Discussions of AIDS in Tanzania are now no longer a taboo, because the president discussed them in national broadcasts and countless speeches," she pointed out.

A recent household survey by Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS) show that about 7.0 per cent of the country's adult population or about 2 million people are HIV-positive and efforts are under way to put 44,000 people on life prolonging drugs (ARVs) by the end of 2005.