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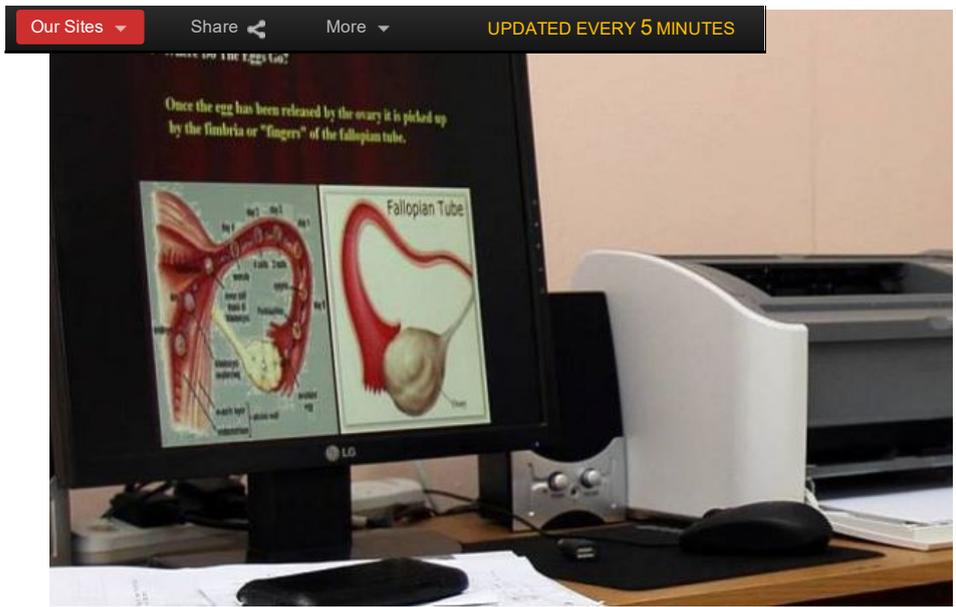
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Sunday, 29 November 2015

Act to ensure country has regulations on artificial reproduction

BY YUEN MEIKENG

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia will soon join the ranks of countries like Canada, Australia, Singapore and Germany that have laws to govern artificial reproduction.

A new law is in the works to regulate all issues related to artificial reproduction, including in vitro fertilisation (IVF) as well as the donation and storage of human eggs and sperm.

Currently, there are no official policies to govern the field but this is about to change with the proposed Artificial Reproduction and Tissue Act.

“We are in the final stages of formulating the law. The sooner we have the law, the better,” Health Ministry (medical) deputy director-general Datuk Dr Jeyaindran Sinnadurai told *The Star* recently.

He said discussions were still ongoing to iron out certain issues before the Act is tabled in Parliament, expected to be early next year.

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The Act will also address certain practices by unscrupulous parties, such as the commercial trading of eggs or sperm.

Dr Jeyaindran said the law would deter parties from neighbouring countries from selling such genetic material to couples trying to conceive here.

Artificial reproduction refers to the process of creating new life apart from natural methods, including the use of assisted reproductive technology like IVF.

Such methods are normally used in fertility treatments.

Previous reports of ethical and religious concerns regarding assisted reproduction technology have hampered laws from being introduced to regulate the field.

Noting this, Dr Jeyaindran said the proposed Act would be "all-encompassing" to address concerns by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

It will also set out safety guidelines on the proper management of the storage of reproductive cells like eggs or ova and sperm.

"Once enforced, the law will also be applicable to foreigners seeking services here for assisted reproduction. This will be in line with the expected growth in medical tourism in the region," added Dr Jeyaindran.

The new law has been met with positive response from the industry.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Ashok Zachariah Philip said the principle of having the law was good because the assisted reproduction industry was still new and unregulated.

Dr Ashok said aside from IVF, there were also potential problems when it came to surrogate mothers.

"Commercial surrogacy is not legal in Malaysia. But there is a grey area if a woman becomes a surrogate mother without any remuneration. Problems can also arise if the surrogate mother does not want to give up the baby," he said.

Consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist Prof Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan said the proposed Act would augur well at a time when more people were resorting to IVF treatments.

Currently, the average cost of an IVF cycle is RM15,000 with no guaranteed success.

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