

## Corruption alert!

By **MOHAMMED AL A'ALI**

BAHRAIN'S Health Ministry is diseased with corruption for which there seems to be no cure, an MP declared in parliament yesterday. It has been widespread since the early days of independence in the 1970s and will never end, said parliament legislative and legal affairs committee chairman Yousif Zainal.

The case of cochlea implants for deaf children is just one example, he said as Health Minister Dr Nada Haffadh appeared to answer MPs' questions yesterday.

"I chose this topic particularly to tell everyone that the minister, Dr Nada Haffadh, who I have the utmost respect for, doesn't respect the Tender Board regulations," he told fellow MPs.

"Dr Haffadh has been involved in three deals for 12 implants without the board authorising them.

"The board authorised a tender for 10 implants, with 12 others being bought directly.

"The extra expenditure reached around BD150,000, something the minister will have to explain."

Mr Zainal said that each implant cost BD12,300 each, yet there were companies which could provide them cheaper.

"The market has seen great competition in the field and prices have halved, but the ministry still buys expensive ones," he said.

"A private hospital has asked the ministry to give it a licence for implants, for reasonable prices, but it refused.

"There are clouds over this decision, with fingers pointing to certain officials."

Mr Zainal said a ministry investigation committee was formed in February last year to look into irregularities at the ministry, but only started its work in September.

"It is apparent that there are people benefiting from this delay and to add further injury, the committee has met just a few times," he said.

"The cochlea operation rehabilitation is carried out by the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Hearing and Speech Development Centre, a

charitable organisation, yet monthly fees of BD150 are being taken.

"No one knows where the money goes to and if the centre is licensed to do such service."

Dr Haffadh said that the ministry has carried out 32 successful operations since 2001.

"Twelve other cases have been treated abroad due to budget deficiency at the ministry in 2003 and 2004," she said.

"Rehabilitation is then carried out by the ministry, but due to a staff shortage the centre is doing the service for a minimal fee.

"Some are still being rehabilitated at the Salmaniya Medical Complex for free."

Dr Haffadh said the ministry spent BD180 every three days just on batteries for the implants. "Whenever one is damaged, we replace it, if the guarantee has ended," she said.

"We have a special team to technically supervise these machines."

Implants used last year were bought under the supervision of the Tender Board, said Dr Haffadh.

"Gulf Pharmacy has won the new tender after fulfilling requirements for the implants," she said.

Dr Haffadh said the waiting list for implant operations was full. "We have between seven and 10 newborn cases out of 1,000 every year who require immediate operations, but the ministry doesn't have the required budget," she said.

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