

Study on solving shortage of nurses

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The Government is monitoring the shortage of nurses in the country and will conduct a study on ways to overcome the problem, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the attraction of better pay and perks overseas had resulted in the shortage, noting that Malaysia could not possibly compete with the developed countries in offering such benefits.

He said if the Government offered better salaries to the nurses, other service sectors would also demand pay rises.

"This is the problem. It is not that we do not want to pay, but if we give one sector, we must give to all. We must be fair," he told news-

men after officiating the ground-breaking ceremony of the National Heart Centre here.

Asked what sort of incentive the Government could afford, Dr Mahathir said the Government had not considered it.

Dr Mahathir also acknowledged that the private sector faced a shortage of

Reasons

nurses and that a number of Government nurses had gone into the private sector.

In view of this, the Government would allow the private sector to recruit foreign nurses so that they would not recruit Government nurses.

Previously, the private

sector was allowed but not encouraged to recruit foreign nurses.

Earlier, speaking at the function, Dr Mahathir said the world was now faced with a shortage of nurses due to a number of factors, among them:

- countries that were rich but with small populations were wooing foreigners with better salaries to work in their medical institutions; and

- in developed countries, many people refused to work as nurses because of the fear of acquiring certain deadly diseases.

Because of such a situation, there were now more job offers for nurses from developing countries. Dr Mahathir cautioned that the country could face a shortage of nurses to fill certain important posts that were being created, such as in the National Heart Centre.

"We will then be forced to recruit nurses from countries that are less developed than us. We can no longer be proud because we will no longer be treated by our own people," he said.

He said the Government was monitoring the situa-

tion, but added that the people should be aware of the constraints faced by the country in its efforts to have a quality health service.

Dr Mahathir said the Health Ministry was drawing up a comprehensive preventive programme against cardiovascular diseases.

Facilities

Noting that cardiovascular diseases have become the main cause of death in the country, Dr Mahathir said preventive measures were better than cure.

He said among others, campaigns to encourage a more healthy life-style would continue to be implemented. Based on the experience of developed countries, the number of heart and cardiovascular cases could be reduced through following a healthy life-style.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was always sensitive towards the health problems faced by the country. A number of health and medical services would be upgraded in the next Malaysia Plan.

Besides increasing the number of facilities, the standard of such facilities would also be upgraded so that the people would enjoy more comprehensive medical service.

On the National Heart Centre, Dr Mahathir said it was part of the Government's programme to upgrade the country's capability and technology in the treatment of cardiovascular diseases.

The \$65-million centre, located on a 1.6ha site near the KL General Hospital, would be the main referral centre for cardiovascular and cardiothoracic diseases in the country. It would have modern equipment and facilities.

The centre would also be used as a training and research institution for heart-related diseases.

The 250-bed five-storey building would have four operating theatres — three for open heart surgery, and one for closed heart surgery and thoracic surgery.

There would be three cardiovascular laboratories for investigation and angioplasty besides auditorium and seminar rooms for training.