

FOREIGN CURE FOR SHORTAGE

Govt may allow non-local docs to operate

By Wong Chun Wai

PETALING JAYA, Fri. — The Government may allow foreign doctors to practise in the country to overcome the shortage.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who hinted this today, said the Government was considering allowing the foreigners to work in private hospitals and even set up clinics.

The Prime Minister said that, however, certain conditions will be imposed to protect local doctors as well as patients.

At present, foreign doctors can work only with the Government.

Dr Mahathir said that a thorough study on the matter would have to be carried out first before any decision was made.

Speaking to newsmen after opening the second Malaysian Obstetric and Gynaecology Congress, he said the foreign doctors which the Government had in mind could be from Asian and even European countries.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had tried to prevent its doctors from leaving government service by offering them higher salaries but this move had its constraints.

"If we raise the salaries of only doctors and not those in the other sectors, there will be problems," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the Government was not in a position to compete with the private sector.

He said that if the number of doctors, including those in the private sector was increased sufficiently, it would be less attractive for doctors in the government service to leave.

In his speech, he said a review of the Government's policy on foreign doctors was necessary to help ease the shortage of doctors.

The move, he said, would help reduce the exorbitant fees charged by private clinics.

He said the high fees charged by such clinics had led to the poor thronging government hospitals to seek treatment.

Dr Mahathir said that because of the lucrative income offered by the private sector, the retention of specialists in government service had become a problem.

"There is a need to balance the incomes of doctors in the public and private sectors to ensure that the people enjoyed the appropriate services," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said the Government would, within its means, set up well-equipped obstetric and gynaecology units in all hospitals.

However, he said, building big and well-equipped hospitals was not the answer to improving health care for women or to reduce the mortality rate.

The Prime Minister said that what was needed was a solid and quality basic health system for mothers and infants, health education for women and special care for them.

Director-General of Health Tan Sri Dr Abdullah Abdul Rahman said he would discuss with the Malaysian Medical Council the Prime Minister's idea on allowing foreign doctors to practise in Malaysia.

"We will discuss whether we can review the existing policy since it has been brought up by the Prime Minister," he said.

Tan Sri Dr Abdullah, who was present at the ceremony, said that foreign doctors practising in Malaysia had to register with the MMC.

The Health Ministry, he said, employed about 50 foreign doctors, mainly from Burma, India and Pakistan.

Report on future of C'wealth

PETALING JAYA, Fri. — Senior Commonwealth officials are preparing a report on the future of the 19-country grouping, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the report would be discussed by the Commonwealth High-Level Appraisal Group a day before the Commonwealth Summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, in October.

"The postponement is not causing any problem as the officials have discussed the changes required of the Commonwealth and we will study their report on the eve of the summit," he added.

The Commonwealth Secretariat in London had announced on Wednesday that the appraisal group's meeting was postponed because several heads of state could not attend.

Dr Mahathir said India, facing a general election, could not attend as it was without a Prime Minister.

"Australia and Canada cannot attend either. Therefore, the meeting will not achieve its objectives," he told newsmen after opening the obstetric and gynaecology congress here.

The Prime Minister also welcomed China's support for the East Asia Economic Group.