

Higher wages won't stop Government doctors quit

PM: We can't match private sector pay

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By Rahmah Daud

BANGI, Sat. — The Government cannot match the salaries of its doctors with those in the private sector even if it wanted to, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Matching their salaries would not stop government doctors from leaving the service and joining the private sector, he added.

Any attempt by the Government to raise the salaries of its doctors might prompt the private sector to offer even higher wages.

Dr Mahathir said government doctors would still be left behind in terms of salary compared with their peers in the private sector.

"The country's progress, expanding economy and people who are willing to pay higher fees for the services of private doctors have caused a shortage of doctors in government hospitals," he told reporters after attending Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's 19th convocation.

Moreover, he said, the matching of salaries of government doctors with those of private doctors would have a snowballing effect with similar demands for pay increase by other civil servants.

He said this was evident with the recent implementation of the two-tiered salary scheme for teachers which resulted in civil servants in other sectors demanding a similar pay review.

"The Government cannot afford to pay higher salaries to doctors because of its limited income.

"Even if we submit to their demand for higher pay, this will not solve the

even prompt private doctors to increase the fees levied on patients, thus widening the existing gap in salaries between government and private doctors."

Dr Mahathir said the only way to overcome the problem was to increase the intake of medical students and allow foreign doctors to work in the country.

He said it was unfortunate that many students were not interested in medical courses because of the long period of study.

"Instead, our students prefer easier courses which they can complete in a shorter period.

"This is also the case for other professional courses."

Dr Mahathir said the brain drain problem faced by local universities and government hospitals could only be overcome if the people realised their responsibilities and were willing to make sacrifices.

On the proposal by Universiti Malaya Vice-Chancellor Dr Mohamed Taib Osman that a commission be set up to look into the interests of local universities, Dr Mahathir said careful study was needed as such a move would incur government expenditure.

Dr Mohamed Taib had said a commission was needed to draw up a scheme for university staff and work out budget allocations.

The Prime Minister also said the Government would look into the suggestion by UKM to set up a private clinic for medical specialists to earn extra income in a bid to prevent them from leaving the university for the private sector.