

Dr M on why IJN was set up

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By Farush Khan

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The Prime Minister said one of the reasons for the establishment of the National Heart Institute (IJN), which was operational a year ago, was the Government's concern over the increase in deaths from heart diseases annually.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said statistics showed that 5,294 deaths or 29.1 per cent of the total deaths in the country in 1989 were due to heart diseases. Between 1981 and 1989, the death rate from heart diseases in Peninsular Malaysia rose from 15 to 37 for every 100,000 people.

Between 1979 and 1988, the number of patients admitted to hospitals for heart diseases had also increased from 19,216 to 50,584. In 1989, it soared to 64,696 people.

He said Government hospitals, especially the cardiology and cardiothoracic departments at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, could not cope with the number of heart patients.

Currently, he said, the

KLGH faced a heavy workload with many patients and backlog. Apart from the insufficient facilities and equipment, both departments also faced trained and experienced staff shortage problem. At present there are only three cardiothoracic surgeons and six cardiologists there.

He said this had resulted in a situation where half of the heart patients were forced to wait for months and at times, until two years, before they were treated.

He said the heart surgery cost of at least RM30,000 to RM40,000 overseas was also double the rate in this country.

In view of these problems, he said, the Government felt it was time the country had a heart treatment centre, equipped with modern facilities and equipment.

He said the establishment of the IJN would not only achieve the country's objective to upgrade specialisation in various forms of heart diseases, but also help to overcome the number of backlog cases.

The Prime Minister also said that it was not true that the IJN was established only for the benefit of the well-to-do or those who could only afford to pay.

The prime objective for its establishment, he explained, was to provide specialised facilities for treating all Malaysians with heart diseases and not only a specific group.

"When the decision to corporatise the IJN was taken, one of the objectives was to achieve the Government's social responsibility to absorb treatment cost for its employees and also the lower income group," he said.

"To date, this objective had been well implemented. Of the total 1,683 patients who had been treated at the IJN so far, 863 or 51 per cent were those from the lower income group."

The Prime Minister said he was confident that with the dedication and commitment of its officers and staff, the IJN would emerge as a leading treatment and cardiothoracic reference centre not only in the country, but also in this region.