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Mahathir-Health

GOVT CONSIDERING HEALTH INSURANCE SCHEME

By: Salmy Hashim

PORT-OF-SPAIN, Nov 13 (Bernama) -- The government is considering a health insurance scheme under which everyone working can contribute towards public healthcare which is currently provided free, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister said at a meeting with 77 Malaysian medical students studying at the University of West Indies here on Tuesday that the government could no longer afford to fully support healthcare for the people without contribution from them.

"We are still thinking on how to cater for the very poor. In Malaysia currently, it is a non-contribution free service but in the United Kingdom a certain amount is deducted from the income which means they pay first," said Dr Mahathir who was here on a two-day working visit.

He said healthcare cost had escalated and it was only fair that deductions be made from workers' salaries to pay for healthcare.

He said a patient who needed to take a RM5 capsule per day for the rest of his or her life or a patient who needed RM10,000 for surgery would not be too much for the government to bear.

"But we cannot provide every expensive treatment for everybody. So, we are thinking about health insurance where everyone working can contribute and in return get free medicines," he said.

The Prime Minister, however, stressed that the government would continue to assist the very poor people who needed healthcare.

He said people who could afford it should seek medical assistance at private hospitals while government hospitals should be reserved for the needy.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, said that women doctors are given equal opportunity and equal pay in the medical profession in Malaysia.

She recalled that when Dr Mahathir had a heart attack, a woman doctor was the first to attend to him.

Most of the students at the West Indies University had studied at the Tafe College set up by the MIC.

Dr Mahathir ended his visit to Trinidad and Tobago and departed for French Guiana today. -- BERNAMA

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