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LEAD Mahathir-Professional

"MEDIOCRITY CULTURE" HAMPERS EFFORTS TO RECOGNISE PROFESSIONALS

LABUAN, Aug 29 (Bernama) -- The public sector will continue to lose professional staff as long as certain parties in the sector continue to feel that the government need not accord recognition to the professionals through higher wages.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today such attitude, which he described as the "mediocrity culture", could prevent the government from according due recognition to the professional group because efficiency in the service was not viewed as a requirement.

"This mediocrity culture is an attitude which gives priority not to the most efficient, the cleverest and the most hardworking among us, but to those who are inefficient and do not care about the country's problems," he said when opening the Labuan Nucleus Hospital, here.

Hence, the public sector would continue to lose professional manpower to the private sector which could offer wages up to four times the wages the government could afford to give, he said.

"We face the problem now not because we do not feel responsible to the people to supply them with all the facilities but we cannot supply them due to the keen competition between the private sector and the government," he added.

He said the government could not stop the professionals from moving to the private sector as a result of this competition.

He said the government could only apologise to the people for the shortcomings in public services due to the shortage of professional manpower.

"It's not that we don't want to (give higher pay to the professional staff) but we can't do it because of certain constraints," he said.

If the government gave this group higher pay, other government officers who did not have the technical and professional qualifications would clamour for similar pay increases, He said.

The prime minister said: "If we give them (professional group) higher pay, we will have problem from others who feel that the government need not give recognition to efficiency and instead ask the government to pay at the usual rates."

Dr Mahathir said that previously the gap between the professionals and non-professionals in the public service was not considered important because at that time there was no sophisticated technology which required specialised skills.

"Now the situation has changed. We need trained people but unfortunately, although we regard them as necessary, we cannot give high wages because others will ask for similar increases so that the gap between them will remain the same like during the pre-technology period," he added.

To the professionals like doctors who still serve the government despite the low wages, the prime minister said: "Thank you...We cannot do anything except to say thank you."

On the RM70 million Labuan Nucleus Hospital, he said the modern facilities at the hospital were in line with the rapid development on the island.

He said providing the facilities and a host of other facilities in Labuan would convince investors and tourists to come to the island.

Present were the prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah

Mohmed Ali, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, Labuan MP Abdul Mulok
Awang Damit and federal and state department heads. -- BERNAMA
JS JK