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Ministry prepared for delay

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THE Ministry of Health is prepared for the possibility of some of its projects to be delayed in view of the current unfavourable currency situation, its minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said.

"In view of the depreciation of the ringgit by some 20 per cent, we stand ready to make the necessary adjustments for national interests," he told a news conference after opening the inaugural world symposium on traditional chinese orthopedics in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"We will cooperate, but we hope that the impact will be minimal as the public's health is very important," he said in response to reporters questions that among the mega projects to be delayed included the building of hospitals and the importing of equipment from abroad.

A local newspaper quoted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying so yesterday.

Dr Mahathir announced last week that certain mega projects will be delayed due to the currency depreciation of the ringgit against the US dollar, resulting in costs of these projects rising as much as 20 per cent.

He said they will be expedited when the value of the ringgit increases again.

Chua added that although the Cabinet had discussed the delaying of these major projects, the details had not been discussed.

"Until we know the extent of the cut, we cannot prioritise," he said. "There are major hospitals to be built under the Seventh Malaysia Plan (7MP) and its high-tech and paperless nature means the cost runs into a few billion ringgit."

Under the 7MP, 21 government hospitals have been identified and approved.

Singling out the Sungai Buloh and RM530 million Selayang hospitals, he said he felt these two will continue construction.

"We will also use local products as much as we possibly can, but we need to import certain medical equipment, as our own industry here does not produce such equipment," Chua said, adding that Malaysia imports most of its medical equipment.

Earlier in his speech, the minister said the field of orthopedics is seen as a marriage between the Eastern and Western methods of medicine.

"Many Western trained doctors from China have succeeded in marrying the best of both systems, thereby overcoming the defects of both systems," he said.

Praising the traditional practises, Chua said because a system of internal and external manipulation like massaging and physical therapy was used instead of surgery, the healing time was shortened.

Chua said Malaysia needed to develop traditional medicine in a wholesome way, so that it will have a scientific basis and contribute positively to the nation.

"It is high time we encourage the people involved in the industry and practises of traditional medicine to demystify traditional medicine through modernisation. It must subject itself to scientific evaluation and the use of modern technology to gain wider acceptance and recognition," he said.

He said his ministry has taken steps to promote the development of traditional medicine in Malaysia.

"Three committees have been set up to study matters pertaining to alternative medicine including traditional medicine.

"The first committee works on the selection of traditional products with proven efficacy, safety and quality for use on government health institutions. The second committee is to study the possibility of recognition and registration of practitioners of traditional medicine based on formal training and standardised qualifications.

"The third committee has the responsibility of looking into the training of practitioners of traditional medicine through formal training," he said, adding that the committees were under the deputy director general of health, Datuk Dr M. Jegathesan.

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