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Civil servants urged not to demand too high a pay

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday advised government servants not to demand for high pay to such an extent that foreigners will have to run the country's essential services.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government is aware that civil servants, especially those in the medical service, do not command as much pay as those in the private sector.

"I am grateful to doctors and specialists who continue their service with the Government although their salary is much lower.

"Some retired specialists continue to serve the public after their retirement. Salary is not a problem to them. I thank all of them.

"If not for these doctors, the majority of government hospitals will have foreign doctors. Currently, many of our nurses are foreigners," he said when opening the Hospital University Kebangsaan Malaysia in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, who is a medical doctor, highlighted a "disappointing experience" when meeting Malaysian medical students studying abroad who had questioned him on the low pay of government doctors.

"It is sad that these students, who are not even sure yet of graduating, have already been thinking of their pay. I do regard income as important but when we are still studying, it is better that we concentrate on getting a qualification first before we think of the salary.

"If we are salary-conscious, we should first check the pay scale in the medical service. If we find it is insufficient, we can choose to take up other disciplines which promise better income," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the culture of medical service in several advanced countries has disintegrated as doctors neglect their obligations to the community. Instead, he said, they use their profession to reap as much returns as possible.

He added that their commitment to the patient is dictated by the fees that can be earned and individual attention is also influenced by the quantum of income.

He also said that patients in the West, motivated by the desire to earn compensation which at times ran into millions of ringgit, are also litigious against doctors and hospitals suspected of negligence.

This has prompted doctors and hospitals to exercise extra caution. Sophisticated examinations, which should be a matter of routine, are side-stepped to avert charges of negligence during treatment, said the Prime Minister.

This led to the cost of treatment skyrocketing thus depriving the poor access to medical care, he said.

"This is common in advanced countries. Patients become bankrupt because sophisticated treatment costs too much," Dr Mahathir said.

The situation in Malaysia, however, is not that bad and local lawyers do not coax patients into suing doctors or hospitals for compensation to be shared between the patient and his counsel.

This, however, does not mean that local doctors and hospitals can afford to be careless. They should instead strive to provide the best treatment since the medical profession serves the community.

Dr Mahathir said there are also doctors in developed countries - like those of France's "Medicins Sans Frontieres" - who dedicated their lives to humanitarian service.

"They offer their services to developing countries facing medical problems or areas of armed conflicts.

"They do not take sides. They just want to cure and treat patients with modern medicine," he added.

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