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Mahathir-Doctors

GOVERNMENT SEEKING SOLUTION TO RISING MEDICAL COSTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 3 (Bernama) -- A solution to the country's rising cost of treatment at government hospitals is being looked into, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said Malaysia's free medical service was started in colonial times, especially for expatriates but later covered locals as well.

"In those days the cost was very low and cheap, (but now) if the government keeps doing it the pockets will be empty," he said at the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) dinner here tonight.

The people, he said, did not see that the government was trying to improve the service when it planned to privatise government hospitals earlier.

"It has been made into a political issue (and) being politicians, we know when to back off," he said.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng announced earlier this year of the government decision to scrap the proposed corporatisation of medical care in government hospitals.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is unique in that it provides free medical service and it hardly happened that one, even the poor, could not get treatment.

He said health care expenditure was given priority in order to expand and improve the service and that a lot of money was also spent to equip hospitals with modern technologies.

In looking at suggestions for a solution to the high cost of treatment, he said the American model would be the last the government would consider.

The habit of suing doctors which is prevalent in the United States would only increase the cost of treatment as doctors have to get expensive insurance coverage.

"Doctors in the US, I have been told, do not want to treat patients or go out in case of an accident.

"They are afraid of being sued," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said government doctors were not adequately paid and this would be looked into.

"But, as usual, if you attend to one profession then you will also have to look into other professions," he said.

He said the government is looking into allowing government doctors to do private practice as a way of solving the problem.

-- BERNAMA

SBJ THG