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Mahathir-Health

GOVT FINDING WAYS TO OVERCOME ESCALATING COST OF MEDICAL TREATMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the government is finding ways to overcome the escalating cost of medical treatment and ensure that the poor are not denied of medical treatment.

The prime minister said the government was not trying to run away from its responsibility to provide better health care services in the country when it promoted the privatisation of health care services.

"We want to look after the health of the patients but we cannot afford to pay for everything. Some of the patients at least must be prepared to pay.

"After all, when they go to private doctors, they do pay the private doctors very high fees but when they come to government hospitals they expect to be given free treatment," he told participants of the International Conference on Globalisation here, during a dialogue session.

The two-day conference is organised by the Finance Ministry and Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Isis) Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir was answering a question from the floor on the direction of Malaysian government's policy about health care reforms as it promotes the privatisation of health care services and whether it has made it possible for the poor to have access to private hospitals.

The prime minister said the government had allowed people to get medical treatment even for surgery, which was very costly, but by paying only a nominal amount.

"But as the cost keeps on escalating, I don't know whether the government can afford it. We have to make do with the present system and we will try to find ways of overcoming this escalating cost," he said.

Elaborating on the country's healthcare history, Dr Mahathir said the government could not keep on bearing the cost as it was getting expensive.

"In those days we used to prescribe cough mixture which cost one sen, for free but today the treatment costs a lot more. One capsule which has to be taken four times day, each costs RM5 to RM10," he said.

He said to lower the cost, the alternative was to privatise or corporatise the hospital so that they could then decide who to charge.

"Perhaps the very poor people would be given free treatment and those who are able to pay are required to pay for the medicine or pay partially for the medicine.

"But the government, it seems is behind the health service because we provide part of the cost of running the hospital," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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