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Peace needed for development

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LUMUT, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government's aspiration of turning Malaysia into a centre of medical excellence would not materialise without a peaceful and stable political climate.

The Prime Minister said without peace and stability the Government would not be able to concentrate on developing the country.

"Instead it will have to focus on countering internal and external threats and the funds to be used for development will have to be channelled for something else."

In such a situation, he said the Government would have to spend more on improving the security of country and therefore would have less money to spend on development.

Speaking at the opening of the Armed Forces Hospital at the Royal Malaysian Navy base here today, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had the ability to develop its medical facilities and make it on par with other developed countries.

He said the Government's plan to build seven "paperless" hospitals under the Eighth Malaysia Plan would enhance the country's medical capabilities.

Equipped with the most advanced information technology, Dr Mahathir said all the medical data and documents would be stored in the computer system.

He however did not elaborate on the hospital projects.

Dr Mahathir hoped the opening of the Armed Forces Hospital today would mark the beginning of a new age in medicine for the country.

He said the hospital, which is equipped with the latest equipment, was capable of providing up-to-date medical and specialised services.

"It is a modern hospital with specialised facilities like the diving and hyperbaric medicine. It also has close relations with other hospitals such as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Hospital and other government hospitals," he said.

The RM65 million Armed Forces Hospital, which began operations in 1996, is the third military hospital after Kinrara in Kuala Lumpur and Terendak in Malacca.

The 164-bed hospital with seven wards, provides all basic and specialised services to the RMN population and some 35,000 armed forces personnel from the northern region, their families and pensioners at the naval base.

Facilities available at the hospital include an out-patient clinic, emergency and accident unit, surgical unit, orthopaedic unit, pathology, pharmacy, imaging, obstetrics and gynaecology, psychiatry and physiotherapy.

The hospital also has magnetic resonance imaging equipment and seven haemodialysis machines.

Its most advanced equipment is the RM5 million hyperbaric chamber, a decompression chamber for the treatment of problems relating to underwater diving and adverse clinical cases that require oxygen therapy. Set up in January 1997, the chamber has treated more than 300 victims of clinical and diving related incidents.

Similar chambers are available at the RMN Area One headquarters in Kuantan and the RMN Area Two headquarters in Labuan. The chamber is not available at any other government hospital in the country.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir, who was on a day-long visit to the RMN base here, inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 101 RMN officers led by Lt Kdr

Ahmad Mahmood before attending a briefing by Fleet Operations Commander Laksamana Muda Datuk Ilyas Din.

He later witnessed the handing over of a training ship MV Fajar Samudera from Pelangi Shipping Sdn Bhd (PSSB) to RMN. The 2,165-tonne ship, which is 90 metres long and 15 metres wide can move at a maximum speed of 19 knots and stay in the open sea for 21 days.

Currently docked at the RMN KD Pelandok training unit, it has four classrooms, a computer lab, a staff mess, a surau and a dining room, and can accommodate some 400 trainees and crew members.

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