Health cover plan may start after 2004

STAR 15 NOV 2002

By NICK LEONG

KUALA LUMPUR: The proposed national health insurance scheme could be introduced after 2004, said Deputy Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Sulaiman Mohamed.

However, he said, there was no specific timeframe to be adhered to.

"It will probably take about two years (for the scheme to materialise) after careful studies by the Government," he said after opening Malaysia International Health Fair 2002 at the PWTC here yesterday.

The idea of a national health insurance scheme was first raised in 1997 but was put on the shelf following the Asian economic crisis, which also hit the country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had raised the prospect of a national health insurance scheme again last month when he said the Government could no longer continue to bear the burden of looking after the health of the entire nation's population on its own.

Dr Sulaiman said the Government had received a lot of proposals from insurance companies since the idea of the scheme was re-floated recently.

"The EPU (Economic Planning Unit) is looking at the proposals," he said.

Besides the proposals from local insurance companies, Dr Sulaiman said the Government was looking at national health schemes of other countries.

"We want a scheme that does not benefit one party at the expense of another. We want a win-win situation for the people, the (insurance) operators and the Government," he said.

Commenting on the threat of dengue, Dr Sulaiman said tropical countries like Malaysia could not eliminate the threat completely.

He said the authorities were stepping up measures to curb the threat by conducting checks in areas prone to the disease.