

Cost of treatment now very high, says Mahathir

PUTRAJAYA: Insurers have their reasons to increase health premiums as the cost of hospitalisation and treatment has escalated, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The fact is that the cost of treatment now has gone very high, especially when it involves surgery.

"Insurance companies are not charitable organisations. They are there to fulfil the need, in other words, to average out the cost for treatment in the case of rising costs," he said when asked to comment on a report in *The Star* that insurers have started increasing health premiums by between 20% and 30% to offset rising hospitalisation and surgical cost.

Asked on the proposed national health insurance scheme, Dr Mahathir said the people must accept the fact that they must contribute in order to get treatment at government hospitals.

"We have to think of some contribution through some form of insurance but the moment you say people should contribute, there is a big uproar, they want free medicine. Even people who can afford want to have free medicine.

"We do want to give free medicine, but only to some people who really can't afford," he said after launching a book, *In the Time of the Mishmish*, by Alijah Gordon at his office yesterday.

Dr Mahathir had recently proposed the scheme because, according to him, the Government could no longer continue to bear the burden of looking after the health of the nation's population on its own.

He said Malaysia inherited a health system where medical treatment was free but over the years, the cost had gone up.

He also said that private hospitals had the social obligation to consider giving free treatment or lowering fees for poorer people.