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Chua praises private hospitals for heeding Dr M's call

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng today welcomed the positive response from private hospitals to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call to reduce fees for the poor.

"This is an encouraging response. Their efforts should be praised," he said.

Chua said he was confident that private hospitals would respond well because it was the social responsibility of the medical profession to save lives and provide help in an emergency.

He was speaking to reporters after a briefing on the Lantern Festival Parade, to be held in Bukit Bintang here, on Sept 20.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is expected to officiate at the event organised by the Bukit Bintang MCA division.

On Sunday, Dr Mahathir, in his speech at the 10th annual dinner of the National Heart Institute, urged private hospitals to reduce medical fees for the poor.

He said if Malaysians were willing to donate money to the poor in need of medical help, there was no reason why private hospitals and specialists should not do likewise.

Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia president Datuk Dr Ridzwan Bakar had said that private hospitals had been practising charitable measures for quite some time.

These included charging at cost for operations and rendering free service when warranted at the emergency department.

Dr Ridzwan also said it had been the practice not to deprive treatment to any patient brought into the emergency ward in an unstable condition.

On the National Health Welfare Fund, Chua said the ministry's director-general, Tan Sri Dr Mohamad Taha Arif, would appoint the committee soon.

"Please give him some time to finalise the mechanism for the new system," he said.

On the Lantern Festival Parade, the event will be co-sponsored by the Youth and Sports Ministry, Impiana Hotel, Magnum Corporation Sdn Bhd, Six Happiness Holdings Sdn Bhd, Sungei Wang Plaza Sdn Bhd, BB Plaza and New Southern Record Sdn Bhd.

Chua, who is also the festival's organising committee adviser, said the highlight would be the world's longest mooncake measuring 548 metres, which would be carried from Century Hotel to Sungei Wang Plaza shopping complex.

The mooncake will be endorsed by the Malaysia Book of Records.

"The parade is a popular national event and participation is growing. We expect at least 30,000 people this year," Chua said, adding that RM350,000 would be spent on the event.

The procession will start in front of Sungei Wang Plaza at 8.30am. This will be followed by a host of activities until midnight.