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Mahathir-Herbs

MAHATHIR CALLS FOR SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH ON MEDICINAL HERBS

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says the time has come for Malaysians to do a systematic research and analysis on the country's medicinal herbs.

With Malaysia having rich biological resources and with biotechnology becoming very important, there was a great potential in extracting drugs from herbs, he said.

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysians produced all kinds of herbs to treat various diseases, they had not been very successful in using the herbs due to a lack of research and analysis.

"We need to find how this medicinal herbs work and it needs a lot of money," he said when launching the Cancer Research Initiatives Foundation (CARIF) tonight.

CARIF, set up early last year, is the first independent non-profit cancer research organisation in Malaysia that focuses on research on cancer and on developing new diagnostic therapeutic tools to combat cancer.

It also explores the rich biodiversity of Malaysia for potential anti-cancer drugs.

The prime minister said it would be a pity if foreigners got hold of the herbs in Malaysia, carried out research and discovered that the herbs could cure cancer.

They would "patent it and regard it as their intellectual property despite finding the plant in Malaysia", he said, adding that they would make tonnes of money.

Dr Mahathir said this was what happened in the case of the periwinkle plant found in Madagascar.

It was taken to a developed country with research facilities which was able to come up with drugs that worked well in curing cancer, he said.

"Madagascar did not gain anything from it," he said.

The prime minister said the Malaysian government did not allow local herbs to be taken out of the country but welcomed foreign scientists and researchers to do research locally, especially with the setting up of the bio valley at the Multimedia Super Corridor.

On CARIF, Dr Mahathir said the private sector should provide financial assistance to the body to enable it to carry out research at a faster pace using more researchers.

He said cancer had now become the "biggest killer" in the country after heart diseases.

While doctors and researchers have been trying for years to find a cure for cancer, reseachers had lately found medicines that could retard the growth of cancer, he said.

However, these medicines cost a lot and are not easily available, he said.

Dr Mahathir hoped that with CARIF, Malaysian could unravel the causes of cancer and find treatment for it.

"But we should not think of achieving this in short space of time. Research takes a long time and lots of money," he said.

CARIF is based at the Subang Jaya Medical Centre and is sponsored by Yayasan Lim, Petronas, Malaysian Totalisator Board and Bakti.

The organisation collaborates with local universities and research institutes as well as Britain's Bristol Univrsity and University of Cambridge, Australia's Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the

American-based Van Andel Research Institute.

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