

# Doctors prefer private sector: Mahathir

SUN 14 FEB. 2003

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Although they can match private hospitals in terms of facilities, government hospitals are still second rate as the best medical personnel are with the private sector.

There will be no end to the dilemma faced by government hospitals, if the medical practitioners continued to be lured to the private sector, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Speaking as a former medical practitioner, who resigned from the government service to open up his own clinic, Mahathir said the government could never match the attractive remunerations in the private sector.

"We can buy all the equipment and drugs but producing surgeons and ancillary staff is far more challenging," he said when opening the 11th annual meeting of the Asian Society for Cardiovascular Surgery conference (ASCVS).

"Should the government increase the pay, the private sector can more than match it.

"We are building a large number of ultra-modern fully-equipped paperless hospitals costing billions of ringgit. But we may see them as white elephants because

we cannot staff them."

Mahathir said that as the standard of living rises, there will be continued demand for doctors in the private sector.

He said the problem is aggravated by richer countries offering better compensation.

Later, after a briefing for Umno members, Mahathir said that to alleviate this

problem, specialised services, though still part of the government, will be given special status allowing them to give higher pay, just like specialists in the National Heart Institute.

In addition, by increasing the number of specialists in the various fields, the government hopes to stabilise the migration into the private sector.

The inaugural ASCVS conference, which ends tomorrow, is being attended by 35 international experts of cardiac surgery, and 750 delegates. Two hundred papers will be tabled.

Mahathir said the delegates should not only discuss techniques and developments but refocus on the health concerns within the community and the world.