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PM: Medical tourism boom expected

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QUALITY HEALTHCARE:
RM1b in revenue expected this year, says Najib

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THE government plans to make Malaysia's healthcare system a priority to boost competitiveness in the medical tourism market.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the country's share of the medical tourism market had nearly doubled in the last four years, with more than 770,000 patients and RM700 million in revenue recorded last year.

"This year, the figure is expected to rise to 900,000 patients, bringing in RM1 billion in revenue. Compared with neighbouring countries, we have a long way to go.

"That is why we hope to get the Malaysian Medical Association's (MMA) cooperation (to boost medical tourism)," he said during the launch of the book, *Malaysian Medical Association 55 Years*,

at the Prime Minister's Department Complex in Perdana Putra here yesterday.

Najib said the country's healthcare system emerged tops out of 25 countries surveyed by an American publication, placing Malaysia ahead of Spain, France, Ireland and New Zealand.

This recognition, he said, showed that medical expertise in the country was comparable and, sometimes, better than that in most Western countries.

"This demonstrates our commitment to healthcare in Malaysia, and to making it available and affordable to all.

"Indeed, no other healthcare (system) in the world charges such low rates. An outpatient has to pay

only RM1 (for treatment), while a visit to a specialist doctor costs only RM5. And, the medicine is free."

He reiterated that the government's RM23.3 billion allocation in the 2015 Budget would be used to build two hospitals in Dungun, Terengganu, and Seri Iskandar, Perak, as well as 20 clinics and four dental clinics.

The government will also replace hundreds of haemodialysis machines, and provide space in government hospitals and clinics for the private sector to contribute 244 machines as part of their corporate social responsibility.

"We have increased tax relief on expenses incurred for the treatment of serious diseases, such as cancer, kidney failure and heart attack. We have also set up a programme that will provide free transportation for senior citizens to hospitals," said Najib.

The government also announced that it would establish an additional 30 Malaysia clinics, bringing the total to 290 nationwide.

Present were Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam, Health Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Datuk Farida Mohd Ali, Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah and MMA president Dr Ashok Zachariah Philip.

Meanwhile, Najib commented on the reported poor health of opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is serving a five-year jail term at Sungai Buloh Prison for sodomising his former aide, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, in 2008.

Anwar's lawyers yesterday claimed that his health had worsened, saying he should be transferred to house arrest.

Najib, in a Facebook post, said: "I want the authorities to ensure that he (Anwar) receives the required medical treatment."

Earlier this month, Anwar was admitted to Kuala Lumpur Hospital for scheduled tests.

Upon his discharge, the hospital said Anwar showed no sign of any acute medical condition.

"We have increased tax relief on expenses incurred for the treatment of serious diseases..."
Datuk Seri Najib Razak