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PM-Budget

BUDGET AIMED AT INCREASING GROWTH, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today next year's Budget to be tabled on Friday will definitely be aimed at increasing growth while taking care of the environment.

"The Budget is also intended at reducing the deficit in the balance of payments and in particular to stimulate growth in the Multi-media Super Corridor," Dr Mahathir told a news conference after opening the 11th Conference of the Electricity Power Supply Industry (CEPSI) at the Putra World Trade Centre.

"Generally these are the basic strategies of the Budget...I can't reveal more," he added.

The 1997 Budget will be tabled in the Dewan Rakyat by Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who is also Deputy Prime Minister.

Asked on the role of Independent Power Producers (IPP), the Prime Minister said the government would have to time IPPs to come onstream in keeping with the nation's need for power.

"Obviously we want to have electricity as cheap as possible and therefore those who want to work in this area must convince us that they will help us because we don't want to kill Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) by giving lots of profit to IPPs," he said.

But, he pointed out, the number of plants being started by IPPs or in the process of being approved is quite big, and the government might have to call a halt to construction of more IPP plants.

Dr Mahathir stressed that the cost of a power plant is high and unless the government could ensure them of a market, it was dangerous to let them just build plants and later leave the plants idle.

On electricity and environment, Dr Mahathir said developed countries developed their hydro-electric power at the time "when there were no such creatures like environmentalists".

"So they were able to destroy their environment in order to have their electric power while, in our case, we have to pay some of our money to care for our environment," he said.

On the introduction of electric cars, Dr Mahathir said he is confident there is a big market for such vehicles in the country.

However, to be popular, electric cars must be made suitable for safe driving and steps should be taken to ensure constant supply of electricity by having service centres where the car batteries could be plugged in for re-charging.

Dr Mahathir said Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) had been experimenting with electric cars in cooperation with several companies, including one from the United States which had unfortunately become bankrupt.

TNB executive chairman Datuk Dr Ahmad Tajuddin Ali described the electric van (E-Van) developed by TNB Research and Development Sdn Bhd in cooperation with IVO of Finland as ideal for urban areas as it is less polluting.

He said the van had been approved to be roadworthy by the Road Transport Department and TNB was looking for partners to help improve it.

"We are looking into ways to improve the van, like having a smaller, lighter and stronger battery," he said.

The E-Van can travel up to 200km before it needs a recharge. TNB has

developed three such vehicles. -- BERNAMA  
ZAB ZUL CTL