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Budget-Social

COSTLIER TOBACCO, LIQUOR AND GAMING IN '99 BUDGET

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- Import duty on cigarettes, alcoholic beverages and gaming taxes will be increased as a continuous effort to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce social ills, under the 1999 Budget tabled in the Dewan Rakyat here today.

In tabling it Prime Minister and First Finance Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said import duty on cigarettes and tobacco products will be raised from RM139 per kg and RM162 per kg respectively to RM180 per kg.

Moreover excise duty on locally-manufactured cigarettes will be raised from RM28.60 per kg to RM40 per kg, he said.

Import and excise duty on all types of alcoholic beverages will also be increased by 20 per cent from current rate, he said.

Gaming tax will be raised from seven per cent to eight per cent while pool betting duty will be raised from five per cent and 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent and 12 per cent, said Dr Mahathir.

"Casino duty which is currently at between 22 per cent and 25 per cent will be standardised to a flat rate of 25 per cent," he said.

He announced a RM265-million allocation to continue the agenda for a caring society through rehabilitation and shelter programmes for the needy and the construction and upgrading of welfare homes, activity centres to promote unity and the Social Institute of Malaysia.

A total of RM118 million would be dedicated to implementing programmes for combating social ills besides another RM75 million to expand activities relating to prevention of drug abuse and rehabilitation of addicts, he said.

For poverty eradication, RM108 million would be spent on such programmes for the hardcore poor and for enhancing village economic activities and rehabilitation of dilapidated houses to benefit an estimated 41,300 households.

Dr Mahathir said training for women such as in skills development was crucial especially for those intending to rejoin the labour force or those keen on development their potential.

He said RM50 million would be allocated to assist in such training programmes, which would be co-ordinated by the Department of Women Affairs (HAWA) and channelled also to women's organisations.

Efforts to inculcate Islamic values amongst Muslims would see RM245 million being allocated to the Department of Islamic Development and the Prime Minister's Department for them to intensify the ummah development programme in a more intergrated manner.

The allocation would also be for the development of family institutions and social services, co-ordination of Syariah laws and development of dakwah training centres, mosques and religious schools, said Dr Mahathir.

As for youth development, RM37 million would be allocated to the Youth and Sports Ministry for various programmes, including the revamped Rakan Muda programme.

He said about 4 million poor students would benefit from a textbook and food supplement aid programme involving an allocation of RM440 million in next year's budget while a separate RM5 million allocation would be set aside for Orang Asli students.

"In its effort to reduce the burden of increasing production costs of padi as well as to increase rice production, the Government will allocate RM131 million for fertiliser subsidy," he said.

An additional RM22 million would be provided to increase the amount of fertiliser subsidy by RM50 per hectare, he said.

The government would also continue providing assistance in the form of guaranteed minimum price of padi as a means to increase farmers' income involving an allocation of RM410 million, Dr Mahathir added.

-- BERNAMA

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