

23 OCT 1998

Budget-Human Resource

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT NOT NEGLECTED IN 1999 BUDGET

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- Human resource development will continue to get priority in next year's budget through improvement of educational infrastructure and training facilities, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

A total of RM13.5 billion would be allocated to provide and upgrade educational infrastructure and supporting facilities as well as curriculum development next year, he said when presenting the 1999 Budget at the Dewan Rakyat here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also First Finance Minister, said of that amount RM8 billion would be for primary and secondary education entailing the opening of 183 new primary and secondary schools and construction of another 1,217 new schools next year.

Vocational and technical schools would be upgraded and built respectively while the intake of students into local universities would be increased from 77,600 to 84,000 students in 1999.

To accommodate the increase the government would allocate RM2.85 billion to upgrade academic and teaching facilities, infrastructure and students accommodation.

"Among the physical projects undertaken include the construction of matriculation centres, the Medical Faculty of the International Islamic University in Pahang and the permanent campuses for Universiti Malaysia Sabah including the branch campus in Labuan and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak," he said.

The government would continue to assist students in tertiary institutions through the National Higher Education Fund which would be injected with RM320 million next year to be used by some 24,600 students.

He said RM1.145 billion would be allocated under the Education, Entrepreneur Development, Human Resources and Youth and Sports ministries for skills training in the 79 vocational and technical schools and 16 Skills Development Training Institutes, among others.

Notwithstanding the economic slowdown, the government remained concerned with the housing needs of the lower income group and had set up a number of funds namely, Housing Fund for the Hardcore Poor, the Fund to Accelerate the Construction of Low-Cost Housing and the Revolving Fund for Low-Cost Housing, he said.

Through these funds, 27,500 units of low-cost houses would be built during 1998 and 1999 and an additional RM783 million would be set aside for the construction of quarters for teachers as well as armed forces, police, customs and immigration personnel.

Dr Mahathir said Syarikat Perumahan Negara (the national housing company), which was incorporated early this year with a capital of RM2 billion, would provide loan facilities to developers of low-cost housing projects.

Some RM265 million would be spent on monitoring environmental pollution, conservation of the country's natural resources and improving the environment.

An integrated planning approach would be adopted to ensure sustainable use and development of natural resources, conservation of water catchment areas as well as preservation of forest reserves, he said.

In addition, the government would further enhance cooperation with neighbouring countries, especially those in Asean, to monitor and overcome

environmental pollution such as last year's forest fires.

As for national security and defence, RM8.73 billion would be allocated to the police, armed forces as well as the prisons and immigration authorities, for management and operational requirements, among other things.

The allocation would also be used for the purchase of military equipment, construction of security infrastructure like police stations, new prisons and military bases besides operational equipment such as aircraft, radar, marine police boats, patrol cars and communications equipment.

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