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`Proposal for levy on palm oil profits timely

GERAKAN president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the proposal to impose a levy on crude palm oil when the price exceeds a threshold of RM2,000 per tonne was timely.

"This is a sacrifice that we want from palm oil producers who have received a lot of profits because its price this year was hundred per cent more than what was obtained in 1997," Dr Lim said.

The 1999 Budget proposed that when the price is in the range of between RM2,000 and RM2,050, the levy per tonne will be an amount equivalent to the price in excess of the threshold. However, when the price exceeds RM2,050, the levy is at RM50 per tonne.

"We have a windfall gain in order to help the country in times of economic turmoil. The palm oil producers have to sacrifice and this is very much appreciated.

"It is just like what the union has done. They don't ask for increase in salary and this contributes to the creation of a caring society in Malaysia," Dr Lim, who is also Primary Industries Minister, said.

He added that palm oil producers had been making lots of money and it was unfair for one sector to be making money while the others had nothing.

"We must thank them for contributing and sacrificing the good amount for the country."

On the increased import duty on cigarettes and other tobacco products, Dr Lim said it was also timely as it was the first time in five years that duties had been increased.

"The bigger tobacco companies have contributed RM260 million for the last five years for the development of sports.

"Nobody knows but we needed the money to develop the Commonwealth Games. This year they had given voluntary contributions and in return had asked the Government not to increase the duties.

"I am sorry but it would look very funny if we don't raise the duties after five years. People might think we are promoting cigarette smoking," Dr Lim said.

He added that the big tobacco companies had also volunteered to contribute another RM300 million for sports development over a five-year period.

"Thank you but we have to increase excise duty as we will collect RM250 million per year," Dr Lim said, adding that it was time to add to the Finance Ministry's profits and the money could be used for other development.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said next year's Budget was sensitive to the development of ports and the railways connecting the ports.

"The Budget is sensitive to the development of ports and railways connecting it such as the railway to the Tanjung Pelepas port and Pulau Indah in Westport and the rail to Port Butterworth container terminal.

"This also includes the allocation for improved transportation to the airports," Dr Ling, who is also Transport Minister, said.

Prime Minister and First Finance Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had proposed the Government provide RM4.042 billion for roads, bridges, rail, ports and civil aviation.

Among the road projects that will be continued are Road Traffic Dispersal in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya and

Penang, and access roads to Port Klang and Tanjung Pelepas port.

Rail projects such as the extension of rail to Pulau Indah and Tanjung Pelepas as well as to the Container Terminal in Butterworth are provided a sum of RM335 million.

A sum of RM353 million was allocated for the construction of airports and ancillary facilities such as communications equipment and air navigation aids.

Dr Ling said it was a sensitive and caring budget that reflected the PM's caring attitude.

"Malaysian ports are being increasing heavily utilised now and has been brought up in Cabinet a lot."

What was important is that the Government had done everything to increase the efficiency, predictability, liability and facilities of the port, Dr Ling said.

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