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Budget to bring on smiles (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The 2001 Budget, to be tabled in Parliament on Oct 27, will be a surplus Budget, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Maybe a slight surplus ... although the recent increase in oil prices has caused some problems," he said after chairing a pre-council meeting of Barisan Nasional MPs and senators before the start of the Parliament session today.

In the last three years, the Government has tabled deficit Budgets.

Saying that the 2001 Budget would be "good", the Prime Minister said he was happy that the economic recovery had enabled the Government to table a people's budget.

"It (will) be a good one ... for the people. We always think about the people (thus) we have to manage the economy well."

On whether civil servants could expect any surprises, like a generous bonus payment, the Prime Minister said this was up to Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin.

Dr Mahathir also said that BN MPs who failed to attend Parliament sittings without valid reasons might not be fielded in the next general election.

Asked whether the MPs would be blacklisted, he said they would not but their absence would be noted.

Absenteeism among MPs had been a perennial problem during previous Parliament sittings, sometimes leading to adjournment of proceedings due to lack of quorum.

On the need to issue the reminder, Dr Mahathir said he had to as "they had not turned up in the past".

When it was pointed out that there was still a long way to go before the next general election, the Prime Minister quipped that "those planning on not contesting will not come at all".

Later in the House, Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail announced that Sik MP Datuk Shahnun Ahmad had been granted leave.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting also discussed a motion to be tabled by Opposition leader and Pendang MP Datuk Fadzil Noor on the oil royalty payments to Terengganu.

"I believe this will be answered in detail by Daim during the 2001 Budget."

Later, Fadzil failed in his bid to adjourn the House to discuss the issue when Tun Mohamed Zahir ruled the matter as not urgent.

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