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Festive cheer for pensioners

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - All pensioners will receive a special payment of RM200 each "as a little present", Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced tonight.

"It's a little present for them. It was not in the Budget because we made the decision later ... there were some who asked for it," he said after attending the 2002 Budget dinner.

The dinner was organised for staff of the Finance Ministry and related agencies which were involved in preparing the Budget.

The special payment is expected to be paid within this month. There are almost 300,000 pensioners in the country, and over 100,000 dependents who are receiving pensions.

The Government has also decided to pay a half-month bonus to civil servants on the scale of Jawatan Utama Sektor Awam. These are civil servants in the top management numbering between 800 and 1,000.

Dr Mahathir said these civil servants would also get a 10 per cent pay rise next year, along with the other civil servants.

The 2002 Budget had provided for a half-month bonus or a minimum of RM1,000 and a 10 per cent pay hike for civil servants, but this did not cover those on the Jusa scale.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said he had directed all ministers to submit fortnightly reports to him on the utilisation of the development allocation for their ministries.

He said the allocations were often not utilised fully, and sometimes only 60 to 80 per cent of the year's allocation was spent.

He said he had implemented this monitoring system some time ago and had noted an improvement in performance.

"I want to keep track of the progress of projects and spending."

The Prime Minister said the country had ample funds but it had to be spent for the benefit of the people.

Several measures had been implemented to speed up disbursement of funds and resolve problems of delay and bureaucracy as the Government was relying on domestic spending to boost economic growth.

Dr Mahathir also asked the people to count their blessings, adding that the Budget was a good one despite the complaints of the 10 sen increase in fuel prices.

He said the Government had actually put more money back into the people's pockets through tax cuts and bonus for civil servants.

He pointed out that as civil servants would get a minimum of RM1,000, low-income workers would benefit the most. For instance, those earning RM500 would, in effect, be getting two months' bonus.