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Gift for the poorest

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Almost 30,000 of the country's poorest will get a RM100 gift each from the Government this festive season.

For the first time ever, RM15,000 has been allocated as "duit raya" for 150 people of all races and religions in each of the 193 Parliamentary constituencies, including those held by the Opposition.

The total amount to be disbursed is about RM2.895 million.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad presented the first of the financial assistance today to poor of all races from the Federal Territory (11 constituencies) and Selangor (17).

Recipients from the other States would be getting their gift before Hari Raya. They will be identified by village heads and district offices.

Dr Mahathir, before handing out the gifts at the Federal Territory mosque, said this was the first time the Government was doing so.

"It's just a small sum, not a lot but it'll be something to spend for the festive season. We are giving some help to all the poor in all parts of the country," he said.

He added that this was a one-off event as the Government had enough funds to do so this year.

Dr Mahathir said it was not just for the Muslims as the Government wanted all poor people to have a happier festive season.

"That's the Malaysian way. We don't discriminate against anyone," he said.

Touching on complaints of abuse of power by civil servants, he said this would always happen and even in this case, he was sure that there would be complaints that the undeserving had been selected.

He said he only hoped that there wouldn't be too many cases.

Defending civil servants against allegations of inefficiency in implementing public projects, he said delays were inevitable because government funds had to be carefully utilised.

He also said the funds had to be spent on worthy projects and be monitored properly.

Dr Mahathir added that despite the care taken, there had been some cases of misuse of funds "which had been reported with glee by the media".

Speaking to reporters later, he said the Government helped the poor in many ways but wanted to do something extra for the festive season.

He added that the amount was too small to give a boost to the economy.

Also present were Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, FT BN chief Senator Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor and Selangor BN chief Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo.