

'IT'S A GIMMICK'

STAR 17 SEP 2002 Opposition budget a political ploy, says Dr M

PUTRAJAYA: Drawing up the budget must be done responsibly but the "alternative budget" which the opposition intends to present in Parliament today is a joke, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"It's a joke because they (the opposition) do not know how much money we have and they want to make (table) a budget.

"All they know is how to spend money and become popular," he said when commenting on the opposition's "budget" which will be presented ahead of Friday's tabling of the 2003/2004 Budget.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, told reporters this after attending the Treasury's monthly

assembly and the opening of its building at here yesterday.

The opposition, comprising PAS, Keadilan and Parti Rakyat Malaysia, announced last week that it would table a separate budget to oppose the national budget to be tabled by Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister, who also presented excellent service awards to the Treasury staff, said that if he had wanted to spend government money and become popular, he could also follow the footsteps of the opposition.

"I can also do (it) that but I've to be responsible. They (the opposition) are not responsible for collecting and administering the money," Bernama quoted him as saying.

Dr Mahathir said that the opposition was coming out with the "alternative budget" because it had a political motive.

"Their budget is, of course, a political budget, to show how good they are and why people should support them," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia could develop rapidly and properly because the country had sufficient funds for its development projects.

"We did not borrow from other countries or foreign funds, we developed the country using our own money, we borrowed from domestic sources," he said.

He said the Government did not borrow from external sources as it

collected taxes from the people and corporate bodies and this money was utilised for national development.

"In many other countries, taxes could not be collected, especially income tax, thus it's difficult for them to pay salary to their government employees and develop their respective countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir said many foreign leaders were surprised when told that Malaysia was developed using revenue collected from taxes.

He said a good and efficient civil service had also helped in developing the country properly.

Income tax had increased by 26% in the past few years and this was

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possible because of the efficiency of the Inland Revenue Board, he said.

"Agencies such as the Inland Revenue Board and the Royal Customs Department now set targets in terms of taxes to be collected but this does not mean that the people are being pressured to pay taxes," he said.

Although the Government did not pressure the people to pay taxes, Dr Mahathir said they should pay whatever they were charged.

"We don't pressure the people to pay taxes but effective

and efficient tax collection is key to our success."

Dr Mahathir also explained that the country's financial position now was healthy after surmounting the economic slowdown and financial crisis several years ago.

He said another factor for the country's strong financial position was the substantial funds held by Malaysia, with RM1bil being collected monthly through the Employees Provident Fund.

"The EPF fund has reached RM200bil and the money has been administered efficiently and the occasional problems faced have all been resolved,"

he said.

He also said that good management of Bank Negara Malaysia was another factor for the encouraging financial position of the country.

"BNM transactions have reached a status where there are other countries that want us to organise their financial administration," he said, adding that the country's per capita income was now US\$4,000 (RM15,200).

The opposition, in a statement yesterday, said its aim of presenting the alternative budget was to show Malaysians its economic and development visions for the country.