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`We won't burden people' (HL)

Firdaus Abdullah

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad assured the people today that the Government would not burden Malaysians with unnecessary taxes, but stressed that those required to pay should do so.

"We have no intention to burden the rakyat with too many taxes but those who are taxed must pay," Dr Mahathir said.

"There is no pressure (on the rakyat), what we're doing is to try and collect the dues so that the country's financial standing remains strong.

"We don't pressure the people to pay tax but effective and efficient efforts carried out in collecting taxes is the key to our success. In many other countries, taxes cannot be collected, especially income tax, thus it's difficult for them to pay their employees and develop their countries." Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said that an efficient civil service had also helped develop and administer the country well.

Speaking at the Ministry of Finance's Excellent Service Award ceremony and monthly staff assembly, which also marked the official opening of the new MoF Complex here this morning, he said the strong financial standing of the Government was vital for the country's continued development.

"Because we were on a strong footing we successfully managed many challenges, especially the financial crisis which, by right, should have made us poorer," he said. "We could develop our country with our own money."

Stressing there was no need for the Government to borrow from external sources, Dr Mahathir said individual, corporate and other taxes collected were utilised for developing the country and the people.

He added that another factor was the substantial savings held by Malaysians.

"The Employees Provident Fund, for instance, collects about RM1 billion a month and the fund has more than RM200 billion in its coffers ...we have come to a stage where we have to think about investing these huge funds," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Inland Revenue Board, the Customs Department and Bank Negara had proved their efficiency by enhancing Government revenue.

"Bank Negara is so well recognised for its performance and competence that it is being sought by other nations to organise their financial administration," Dr Mahathir noted.

The Prime Minister presented excellent service awards to 78 ministry staff before officially declaring open the Ministry of Finance Complex.

Located on a 2.12-hectare site on the shores of Putrajaya Lake, the complex comprises a 12-storey tower block and two eight-storey wings on either side.

The MoF Complex, a landmark in itself, recently won the Malaysian Construction Industry Award 2002 for the Best Office Building project and Best Architectural Design.

Also present at the event were Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chan Kong Choy, Treasury Secretary General Tan Sri Samsudin Hitam and Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Zeti Akhtar Aziz.

Dr Mahathir was tight-lipped on the 2003/2004 Budget.

"I will tell you on the 20th (of September)," he said. "If I told you now, the impact of my Budget would not be felt because I told you first.

"I also want to attract attention to my Budget," he joked.

