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Mahathir-Opposition/BM  
DR M TAKES A SWIPE AT OPPOSITION

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad took a swipe at the opposition members who tried to "disturb" him while he was tabling the 2003 Budget at the Dewan Rakyat today.

When touching on the country's economic situation following the economic crisis since 1998, several opposition MPs thumped the tables when Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, announced that private sector investment had dropped and public sector expenditure had increased.

"(The Opposition) don't understand, I think," quipped Dr Mahathir, continuing his budget speech.

Several opposition MPs continued to thump the tables when Dr Mahathir touched on the government's measures to reinvigorate the private sector, including restructuring the financial and corporate sectors and the problem of non-performing loans.

Dr Mahathir thanked the opposition for behaving in such a manner.

"Thank You for thumping, this is our success," he said to the laughter of Members of Parliament and the public who were at the public gallery.

Dr Mahathir also had a slip of the tongue several times when asking the Bumiputeras to stay away from the "crutches culture" -- not to be dependent on the government for assistance.

"Therefore, distance yourselves a bit from opposition parties...distance yourselves a bit from crutches and stand on your own feet," said Dr Mahathir, who later told Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tun Dr Mohamed Zahir Ismail that he had a slip of the tongue.

Dr Mahathir, who appeared to be suffering from a bout of flu, had to stop his speech several times to drink water.

He concluded tabling the budget, which took two hours and 40 minutes, by reading a four-line poetry titled "Unfinished Struggle" and "For You Malaysia."

-- BERNAMA  
RZS HS TS