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Budget-Reaction (Opposition)/BM

OPPOSITION LEADERS GIVE MIXED REACTIONS TO BUDGET

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 20 (Bernama) -- The 2003 Budget tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today drew mixed reactions from opposition leaders.

Parti Keadilan Nasional president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail expressed dissatisfaction that the Budget did not address the issue of food security, which she considered important

On the increased opportunities provided for Bumiputera contractors and entrepreneurs, she said the facilities would give more room for irregularities to be committed.

"The Prime Minister did not say how the opportunities would be distributed to prevent this problem, whether through open tender or what," she told reporters at the Parliament Lobby.

DAP secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka) said the Budget would be well received by the people because it did not propose any new tax or tax hike.

DAP vice-chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw said the RM5 billion allocation for implementing the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English was to ensure effective implementation.

He said the people would be happy that there was no new tax or tax increase but they should remember that the government would step up efforts to ensure tax compliance.

"This is one budget that encourages private sector participation in the economy and at the same time to attract support for the government," he said.

PAS Youth chief Mahfuz Omar praised the government's move to establish a RM1 billion Education Savings Fund to finance higher education and reduce the burden on parents in meeting the educational expenses of their children.

"However, I hope that the giving of free textbooks is extended to all groups and not based on income," he said.

Mahfuz said the government should set guidelines for banks to ensure that they did not impose high interest rates when extending loans to students of higher institutions.

PAS vice-president Mustafa Ali described the Budget as an election budget.

"You can see that there is no long-term solution to basic issues like poverty and housing, only short-term measures...this plan is clearly for facing the election," he said.

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