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Budget-Rural/BM
RM2.56 BILLION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 20 (Bernama) -- The government has allocated RM2.56 billion to provide infrastructure facilities to enhance the standard of living of the people in rural areas.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said this included programmes to build and upgrade major roads, village roads and bridges and provide basic facilities, such as electricity and water supply, health, education and housing as well as telecommunication facilities to narrow the digital divide.

"For 2003, RM2.56 billion is allocated, representing an increase of 36 per cent as compared with 2002," Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said when tabling the 2003 Budget at the Dewan Rakyat today.

He said RM270 million had been set aside for rural roads to complete 111 continuation projects as well as to implement 289 new projects, covering approximately 673 kilometres.

For village roads, he said, RM600 million had been allocated to implement approximately 6,000 projects covering 6,000km.

In addition, RM30 million had been allocated for repairing nearly 1,400km of village roads, he said.

For electricity supply, Dr Mahathir said RM300 million had been allocated to implement 720 projects nationwide, benefiting 103,000 households.

With regard to rural water supply, RM250 million had been provided to carry out 700 projects which would benefit about 84,000 households, he said.

In addition, RM10.3 million had been provided under the BAKAS programme for water supply and rural environmental cleanliness, he said.

With this, 90 per cent and 80 per cent of rural areas were expected to enjoy electricity and water supply, respectively, he said.

For health services, RM289.7 million had been allocated for the construction of 76 rural clinics, including upgrading and repairing of existing facilities, he said.

Several new facilities would also be fully operational, including eight hospitals, 13 health clinics, 60 rural clinics and two training schools for nurses, he said.

Apart from providing infrastructure facilities, Dr Mahathir said the government would introduce the One Village One Industry to help develop the rural community, including farmers and fishermen, to earn income no less than that of the urban population.

Through the plan, small industries, which require between 10 and 100 workers, would be developed, he said.

"Farmers and fishermen can earn salaries as well as invest and own these industries, which will be professionally managed," he said.

Dr Mahathir said a new initiative is being undertaken in Kedah to establish well-planned villages with conducive environment and these houses would be sold at reasonable prices to the locals to enable them to enjoy a standard of living similar to the urban population.

He, however, said developing land ala Feluda scheme was no longer possible due to certain reasons.

-- BERNAMA
MUN AHH TS