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Budget-Haj

COST OF PERFORMING HAJ THROUGH MUASASAH DOWN BY FIVE PER CENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 12 (Bernama) -- The pilgrimage to Mekah next year will be cheaper following the government's announcement that the cost of performing the Haj through muasasah in 2004 will be reduced by five per cent.

Tabling the Budget 2004 in the Dewan Rakyat here today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that to contain the increase in cost of accommodation, Tabung Haji would increase the construction and acquisition of accommodation in Mekah and Madinah.

"Syarikat Penerbangan Malaysia Berhad (PMB) will acquire two aircraft with the view to reducing the high lease cost to Tabung Haji," he said.

The announcement followed calls from various parties to the government to reduce the cost of performing the Haj to give opportunity to more people from the low income group to fulfil their religious obligation.

Prior to this, it was reported that the cost of the performing the pilgrimage to Mekah this year is RM9,445 per person from Peninsular Malaysia, RM9,530 from Sarawak and RM9,575 from Sabah.

As an Islamic nation, Dr Mahathir said the government was concerned with the rising costs of performing the Haj and as such it was committed to ensure that the cost was contained.

"Otherwise, we are concerned that in the future, many Malaysians in rural and urban areas will be unable to perform the Haj," he said.

In addition, he said the government would continue to emphasise measures to instil the true teachings of Islam to ensure Muslims were imbued with noble values and not be misguided by wrong teachings by those who have worldly political interests.

Towards this end, he said RM228 million would be allotted for programmes, under the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), to enhance understanding and appreciation of the teachings of Islam.

He said the government would also provided RM105 million for the construction of training complexes, religious schools, mosques as well as the development of an Islamic information system.

The Prime Minister said the development achieved by the country had led to many leaders and ulamas including Sheikh Al-Azhar to openly proclaimed Malaysia as an Islamic country that should be emulated by other Islamic nations.

"The perception that Islamic nations must be poor, backward, with a government that is always asking for aid and weak, as in states governed by those who are not competent in administration, indeed humiliates Islam," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if Muslims held on to the basic teachings of Islam as in the Quran and hadith, and not influenced by certain ulamas, there was no reason for the Islamic community to be weak, demeaned and oppressed by others.

-- BERNAMA  
MAM AHH ABG