

12 SEP 2003

Budget-Women

GOVT INCREASES TAX RELIEF FROM RM800 TO RM1,000 PER CHILD

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 12 (Bernama) -- The tax relief per child will be increased from RM800 to RM1,000 to assist parents in reducing the burden of expenditure on children from next year.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in proposing the increase on the tax relief in the Budget 2004 in the Dewan Rakyat, said the government was aware of the rising costs of bringing up and educating children.

To encourage the establishment of more childcare centres at the workplace, Dr Mahathir, who is Finance Minister, said the government might consider the establishment of such facility as a condition in the development order of local authorities.

He said this was necessary as the response from private employers had not been encouraging inspite of the tax incentives given by the government to them.

He said the budget would further enhance the programmes for the development of women and family institution with the allocation of RM128.6 million.

Dr Mahathir said this would include training, guidance and counseling to instil greater confidence and encouragement to women, especially single mothers, the elderly and the disabled.

The Prime Minister said to help single mothers in rural areas to increase their income from their businesses, the government would set aside RM100 million from the Village Micro-Credit Scheme to provide loans to those with own businesses.

"Single mothers in the low-income group will also be given priority to purchase low and medium-cost houses from Syarikat Perumahan Negara Berhad (SPNB) with a 20 per cent price discount," he said.

Dr Mahathir also took to task husbands who undermined the status and dignity of women by divorcing their wives through the short messaging service (SMS).

"Using SMS does not reflect respect for the sanctity of marriage and family institutions, including children," he said.

He said that even though Islam allowed husbands to divorce their wives by mere utterance of the words, divorce should not be taken lightly.

"It should be carefully thought through as children often become victims," he said.

In addition, the Prime Minister said SMS was not secure as anybody could use it to send divorce messages without the knowledge of the husband.

"The resultant social problems will not reflect the true character of Islam," he said.

He also took to task those who restricted the contribution of women in development by only allowing them to become teachers and welfare officers and preventing them from becoming judges, government administrators or joining the security forces.

Dr Mahathir said that in the history of Islam, women had fought alongside Prophet Muhammad in war, while in business, Saidatina Khadijah was involved in cross-border trade.

"Remember, heaven lies beneath the mothers' feet. Behind every successful man is a wife. The hand that rocks the cradle shakes the world," he said.

He said that if Malaysia was to restrict the role of females it would only result in reducing the human resources of Muslims by more than half.

As such, he said Muslims would have to depend on others for everything.

"Do not be disappointed when this happens. Do not blame the women if men are unable to control their desires. Islam does not place the responsibility of restraining desires solely on women," he said.

-- BERNAMA

HK MFJ ABG