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BUDGET-MUSTAPA

MUSTAPA MOHAMED SAYS 2004 BUDGET BEST EVER IN 30 YEARS

KOTA BAHARU, Sept 13 (Bernama) -- The executive director of the National Economic Action Council, Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, has described the 2004 Budget presented by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday as the best for the rakyat in the last 30 years.

Mustapa, formerly the Second Finance Minister, said based on his 30 years of experience in government service, the 2004 Budget covered all aspects, including emphasis on domestic sources of growth.

"Never has the government given so much attention to domestic sources of growth because in the past it usually emphasised on the inflow of foreign direct investment," he told reporters after chairing a Kelantan UMNO liaison meeting here today.

Mustapa, who is also the chairman of the Kelantan UMNO Liaison Committee, said the 2004 Budget had demonstrated the commitment of the government to help small time businesses as well as small and medium scale industries.

He said the prime minister had also stressed on efforts to defend the rights of women.

"This budget is relevant to the people in Kelantan. The prime minister will continue to safeguard women in Kelantan and we thank him for this special attention," he said.

On the rise in the import and excise duties of cigarettes and tobacco products by 20 percent, Mustapa said tobacco growers in Kelantan need not worry as because the move would actually benefit them following moves by the government to curb smuggling.

"This means that people in Kelantan can continue to grow tobacco," he said.

Tobacco growers should be thankful to the government for this move to raise the duties, he added.

Meanwhile, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) chairman Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin said the 2004 budget was a caring and balanced budget and demonstrated the government's financial discipline.

Dr Awang Adek, who is also the treasurer of Kelantan UMNO, said this would enable the government to ensure stability over the long term where the reduction in the budget deficit would be welcomed by investors.

"The budget is balanced because it provides attention to various levels of society, including those who are less fortunate, small businesses, and those needing houses," he said. -- BERNAMA

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