

Big debt awaits big budget, says Dr M ^{03.4}

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The former PM also criticises AG Idris, whom he claims is acting like a judge in deciding to drop cases



THERE is no need for the government to be proud of the biggest budget it ever presented in the country's history because the size reflects the amount of debt that the government has to repay, said former Prime Minister (PM) Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

In his debate on Budget 2022 yesterday, Dr Mahathir said a portion of the borrowing that will incur onto the current government spending for next year will be used to repay existing debt, which will also be borne by future administrations.

"When you borrow to pay the debt, it would not reduce the amount of debt. What is happening is only a change in the source of debt.

"Making additional allocations to overcome existing problems does not always reflect the government's ability and wisdom. We do not have to be proud of the size of our budget," he told Dewan Rakyat.

Last Friday, the government presented a national budget of RM332.1 billion for next year, which is an increase of RM9.6 billion or 3%

compared to RM322.5 billion allocated for this year.

The allocation in the 2022 budget will be 20.3% of the total GDP where RM233.5 billion or 70.3% will be channelled to operating expenditure, RM75.6 billion (22.8%) for development expenditure and the balance of RM23 billion for the Covid-19 Fund.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the chairman of Parti Pejuang Tanah Air, said he is aware of the huge sum needed by the government to manage the economic and health crises that stemmed from the pandemic.

However, he noted that the government should be cautious in its spending and ensure that the annual expenditure can be reduced so that future generations are not burdened by the debts.

The budget also did not mention any measures to reduce government spending, said Dr Mahathir.

"If we study it properly, there is a possibility to cut down the allocation. The government's spending can be reduced by utilising new technology and privatising those in education, farming and telecommunication sectors.

"However, when telecommunication is privatised, the government takes over the (development) of the latest technology, which requires billions of ringgit for its service to be made available for consumers.

"Why does the government need to insert itself in this service? It would be best for the service to be



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handed to telecommunication companies that have been providing telecommunication services in the country all this while," he said in relation to the government's monopoly of the 5G rollout via Digital Nasional Bhd.

Besides providing a large allocation for the national budget, Dr Mahathir said Budget 2022 did not touch on crises management either with regards to Covid-19 or the economic downturn. Instead, it leaves it to the administration to take action on the issues at hand.

Dr Mahathir said sometimes the actions taken by those in the administration do not meet the requirements of the allocation, while it is possible some do not

even understand how the allocation will be utilised.

"One of the reasons why the allocation for Budget 2022 is bigger is because of corruption. Everyone knows certain approvals are deliberately delayed or rejected because applicants do not hand out bribes.

"Indeed, the culture of corruption has returned and it continues to increase the costs that will be borne by the government," he added.

Dr Mahathir took a jibe at Attorney General (AG) Tan Seri Idris Harun, whom he claimed is acting like a judge in deciding to drop cases. He highlighted the decision made by Idris where the latter did not object to the approval given to former PM Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Razak's application to visit his daughter in Singapore.

"AG did not object when a prisoner was allowed to leave the country. Yes, it is not against the law, but it sets a precedent.

"In the future, will prisoners be allowed to travel abroad or are there two classes of prisoners?"

Last month, three High Court judges granted Najib's application to amend the dates for temporary release and return of his passport for him to visit his daughter who is expected to give birth in Singapore early next month. Judges Mohamed Zaini Mazlan, Datuk Collin Lawrence Sequerah and Datuk Muhammad Jamil Hussin granted the application as there was no objection from the prosecution.