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All round support form State leaders

THERE was all round support for the 1999 Budget unveiled by Prime Minister and First Finance Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Parliament yesterday.

In Ipoh, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib said amidst regional economic problems, the country could still project positive economic growth, low inflation and unemployment rates.

The 1999 Budget showed that the country, under the leadership of Dr Mahathir could still allocate substantial funds for the development of various sectors.

"The country is still able to perform its obligations to the rural population, the poor, the handicapped, Orang Asli and the community at large.

"This gives an overall picture that our economy is healthy and we can perform well economically."

Ramli said the Budget also reflected the ability of the Prime Minister and the country to identify the "sickness" and provide the right "prescriptions".

In Penang, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the deficit budget would spur economic growth, particularly in the manufacturing, tourism and trade sectors.

He was confident the tax exemption announced for travel sectors especially for domestic tourism, along with the monthly Saturdays off for the public sector, would boost tourism in Penang.

"The extended weekend will definitely increase domestic and foreign tourist arrivals to the State, considering that Penang is already a preferred tourist destination," he told a Press conference at his office in Komtar.

"I expect hotels, restaurants, hawkers and general traders to receive a boost from these newly announced measures, especially for domestic tourism," he added.

Koh welcomed the 70 per cent tax exemption for local export oriented companies, which would boost the State's economic growth.

In Kota Kinabalu, Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok said the 1999 Budget would give a lot of incentives to the people.

He also said although the country was facing an economic slowdown, the proposed Budget reflected that the country's economy was on its way to recovery.

Speaking to reporters at his residence in Penampang, the Chief Minister said, "Sabah will also benefit from the Budget".

Dompok said various incentives were spelt out for Sabah particularly in the development of tourism and agriculture industries.

In Seremban, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad described the Budget as bold and radical but pragmatic for the benefit of all Malaysians.

He said it was truly a "Malaysian-style" Budget to suit the economic situation of the country after measures introduced by international agencies failed to revive the economy.

In Terengganu, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad said before the Budget was presented, many had doubts about it.

"However, observing the sectors emphasised in the 1999 Budget report including poverty eradication measures, we feel that they are realistic

efforts."

Wan Mokhtar, who is in Europe leading a group of the State's businessmen, said this through his Press Secretary Ruslan Abdul Rahman.

In Kuantan, Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob said the 1999 Budget was full of inspiration to stimulate economy.

"We welcome an inspiring Budget. It will boost everyone's spirit to work hard in all sectors resulting in further revival of those sectors such as plantation, industrial, tourism and housing."

Speaking to reporters after a Meet-the-People session at Felda Bukit Goh, he said it would increase public confidence in the Government.

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin said the increased involvement by the Government would help boost the economy and hasten economic recovery.

"The Government under Dr Mahathir's leadership has allocated a lot for infrastructural development, education and rural development."

"This would result in continued growth in those sectors when the policy is implemented."

The Chief Minister also commended the actions taken by the Government to relax the requirement in the banking sector, as it would facilitate the financial institutions in giving out loans.

"This would help boost the construction and auto manufacturing industry."

Abu Zahar also lauded the initiative taken by the Government to grant one Saturday in a month as a holiday for its civil servants, as it would promote a healthy family lifestyle and also boost the local tourism industry.

"Coupled with the effect of a longer weekend in a month, this would help boost tourism industry in the State."

"I have also directed the State Culture, Tourism and Environment committee chairman Datuk Poh Ah Tiam to prepare more tourism related products to cater for the likely influx of tourists."

Meanwhile in Kedah, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid said the allocation for more tourist promotion activities overseas would help to bring in more tourists to the State, especially Langkawi.

"Also the incentives announced for travel agents involved in inbound tourism will spur them to bring in more tourists."

On the declaration of an additional rest day of one Saturday a month for the public sector, Sanusi said for Kedah it would be at the end of the month.

As Thursday is a half day and Friday a holiday, the additional Saturday at the end of the month means civil servants in the State could enjoy a 2 1/2-day holiday at the end of the month to coincide with their pay day.

"This means the government servants can go on domestic vacations," he said.

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