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Man in the street gives measures thumbs up

THE national budget announced by Prime Minister and First Finance Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today was followed closely by Malaysians from all walks of life eager to know how they would be affected.

The New Straits Times talked to some of them in Kuala Lumpur to get their views on subjects close to them such as the waiver of income tax for the year 1999, abolishment and raising of taxes of some items and extended weekends for Government servant:

HASSAN ABU MANSOR, 34, contractor

"The two-day weekend per month for Government servants can encourage families to go on local tours but I think it is better that it is held at the same dates for all departments so that the private sector can participate in it better.

Tour operators for example know when to do their promotions while those who deal with Government counters know which day not to go there.

On the increase of tax for cigarettes, I know that an increase of 25 sen for a large pack is not enough to stop anybody smoking."

SHAHAR FADZIL, 20, waiter

"There is a certain novelty to having a two-day weekend for government servants and I think it'll certainly help make up their minds on what to do for the weekend especially now that they can zoom out of the city on a Friday and return late on Sunday.

However, like all novelties I doubt they will last long. Yes, they would go outstation with families for vacations but after some time they would just likely to go back to the normal lazy Sunday routine."

FARAH ANGELINA ABDULLAH, 31, ex-airstewardess.

"When it comes to income tax waiver, I doubt if I will benefit much. The last income tax I remembered paying was only RM300 and that was like for six years of work.

Next month, I will start working with another airline and if my last job is any measure, the tax waiver for 1999 has no bearing on me at all.

Still I'm sure others would benefit from it and more disposable income would be made available for families and individuals to spend or save."

AHMAD ABDUL RASHID, 43, customs officer

"The tax waiver for locally-made televisions, refrigerators and air-conditioners is surely welcomed but as far as individuals are concerned the discount, is too small to be of any significance compared to the price of the items.

After all how many times do we buy these items a month.

As for the tax increase for cigarettes, well, I think those most likely to be affected are the teenagers and youngsters who will feel the pinch but not those stuck in their habits like adults."

AMIR HAMZAH MD.JONED, 26, contractor

"I'm not sure how the income tax waiver would benefit me as I conduct my own business. But I'm sure salaried workers can have something to look forward to and a little more money to spend.

This is more so during the current economic difficulties.

I believe the economy might just recover next year and then they can start paying their income taxes as usual, starting in the year 2000.

As for the one two-day weekend per month for public servants, I think it can help spur local tourism but not that much as families still prefer to spend time at home during weekends."

RASHID MAJID, 47, chairman of furnishing company.

"The measures taken by the Government are brilliant. It is a direct, no-nonsense move to improve the present state of the economy with the interest of businesses in mind.

The increase in cigarette and liquor prices should not pose any problem as they are luxury items. They are not a necessity. Besides, even with the hike in cigarette price here, it still cost less compared to some other countries.

The one free Saturday per month for civil servants should not cause any problem. It gives them more time at one stretch though. As long as the quality of work they produce is good, the question of the number of working hours shouldn't be of much concern."

JEFFREY LIEW, 32, freelance advertiser

"I think the budget is a welcomed relief. By abolishing income tax for 1999, we should expect a long term benefit from that measure alone. The Government is taking some good and bold actions in handling this economic crisis.

The increase in the price of cigarettes and liquor is alright for the general public but it will hurt the entertainment industry. Some businesses require their personnel to entertain their clients and if prices go up, they will definitely be affected.

But right now, I suppose we have to make some sacrifices for the good of the country."

LINDA BAHRAIN, 25, restaurant supervisor

"Right now we should concentrate on our country. I think the tax waiver for the locally-made household products is a good idea as we should all start buying Malaysian-made goods.

There is no need to buy imported items right now when the country produces many of the things we need, and now at an even lower price.

Besides, if we look closely at our locally-made products, we'll see that they are of good quality."

ZULIHSAN ABD RAHIM, 25, student

"I'm afraid the increase in cigarette and liquor prices will encourage smuggling in the country. Other than that, I think we can all benefit from less consumption of the two products.

The idea of waiving income tax next year sounds great but can the government afford to do such a thing? Where will the money come from?

The one long weekend per month for civil servants will give them more time for relaxing and to spend quality time with the family.

They can really help our tourism industry if they make good use of that leisure time to travel or even go sight-seeing."

AISHA ABD RAHMAN, 51, hawker

"The tax waiver in 1999 will definitely help the people. With the present situation involving pay cuts and retrenchments, these people still need to pay for the house, the children's studies and other expenses. It will be a big relief for them.

When it comes to cigarette and liquor, they're not really a good thing to begin with. The people would now have to think twice about consuming them."

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