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Be tough on tax dodgers

THE citizens of a country are bestowed with certain basic rights and privileges but in return they are also expected to reciprocate and discharge their responsibilities.

This is a fair trade-off which should be acceptable if we are to create a harmonious and just society. But unfortunately, there are people who evade their responsibility by not paying their taxes or deliberately pay less than what they should rightfully and legally be paying. This blatant cheating by tax dodgers should be stopped because it deprives the Government of valuable revenue which can be used for the country's development and to enhance the health and education of the people.

One can understand if the tax dodgers are income earners who may have fallen on hard times and thus find it difficult to make tax payments. What is surprising is that some of the worst culprits are business people who make millions of ringgit and it would certainly not hurt them a bit if they honestly and sincerely settle the dues required of them.

And yet they hide or under-declare their true income to evade taxes. Another surprise is that among the big tax dodgers are believed to be some titled persons. Inland Revenue Board chief executive Datuk Zainol Abidin Abd Rashid said there were also flower growers and pottery makers who have evaded taxes running into millions of ringgit. There are also so-called petty traders who have seen their businesses prosper over the years and their sales and profits rising by leaps and bounds. But sadly, many of them who have made good continue to grossly under-declare their income.

The dodgers would not get away that easily, however, as the tax authorities are going after them by stepping up investigations, preventing defaulters from escaping overseas and improving tax collection measures. There should be no compromise for the tax dodgers and tough action will be needed to pursue them so that they pay up what they owe the Government or face their due punishment.

We know that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is tough but he is also compassionate. Being the realist that he is, come Oct 19 when he presents Budget 2002, Dr Mahathir will no doubt use his wisdom to balance the demands for more funds to meet the urgent needs of nation building and provide some help to the people to alleviate their financial burden in view of the more gloomy economic climate. Can we expect an expansionary budget?

With a slowing economy biting into the fortunes of the private sector, one can also expect the Budget to provide some tax incentives and relief to businesses and entrepreneurs to help them overcome any difficulties that they may face because of the economic slowdown. The country would be better off if we see more entrepreneurs and businessmen succeed in their ventures and expand their enterprises so that they can provide more employment and pay more taxes to the Government to be used to improve the country's infrastructure.

We acknowledge the dynamism and contribution of private sector enterprise to the nation's economic progress. But those who have succeeded in building up their businesses should also remember their responsibility to society by paying adequate taxes.

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