

PM: Nation-building not over

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MALAYSIANS were reminded that the task of nation-building was far from complete.

"The path to development is long and winding and it will not be easy," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when presenting the 2003 Budget in Parliament yesterday.

He commended workers in the private sector and public employees who, he said, had stood firmly behind the Government through good as well as bad times, and announced a one-month bonus or a minimum of RM1,200 for all civil servants.

Touching on wide-ranging issues including a warning against the hype of Western media about Malaysia's so-called "mega" projects, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said Malaysians must uphold their status and dignity.

This, he said, demands perseverance, resilience, determination, diligence, integrity, sincerity and sacrifice by all including those in villages and cities, young and old, and haves and have-nots.

"Our struggles are not over. Only those who persevere and are resilient can reach the pinnacle, and we can be a successful nation," he said, quoting a paragraph from the poem *Keranamu Malaysia*.

Dr Mahathir said the private sector had shown its "Malaysia Inc" uniqueness and had worked relentlessly to



Today's youths are post-Independence children who only know how to shout merdeka but are unable to understand the true meaning of the word.

— Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

contribute to the nation's growth.

"They did not resort to industrial action even though their salaries did not commensurate with their demands and, in some circumstances, were retrenched," he added.

Dr Mahathir praised the public sector, including the armed forces and the police, for their professionalism and efficiency.

"As a token of appreciation to civil service members, the Government has agreed to give a one-month bonus or a minimum of RM1,200.

"I hope it will reduce the burden of those in the lower-income group to meet expenses for the coming festivals and prepare for their children's schooling," he said to loud thumping on the table by MPs.

He said the country had managed to overcome the regional financial crisis and the Sept 11 incident, which worsened the global economy.

Dr Mahathir said the 2003 Budget was the first step towards the implementation of a new approach on the country's development policies and strategies.

"During the recovery process, we must be agile, act fast and respond to changes in our environment.

The Prime Minister warned Malaysians not to be swayed by the foreign media which invented the word "mega".

"We have often been accused of being lavish in undertaking the so-called mega projects. Mega is a relative term. A small project can be mega if the nation cannot afford to finance it.

"A large project which can be financed by our own resources is not mega," he said.

Despite the financial crisis,

he said Malaysia was able to continue with the implementation of almost all its projects.

"Abandoned projects are only those of the private sector," he said.

Dr Mahathir said, by using the rule of law, the Government had spared the country from witnessing violence by fanatical Muslims.

"The Internal Security Act has indeed saved the nation.

"The rule of law is paramount. Its adherence should not be confined to the elected Government but also to other branches in the administration," he said.