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Another ICT-friendly Budget on the cards?

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IT'S Budget Day tomorrow. This is the time of the year when Malaysians, from the average homemaker to the high-flying chief executive officer will be glued in front of the TV set to follow the proceedings live from Dewan Rakyat.

The avid cyber surfers meanwhile will feel "savvier" and cool to follow the event on the Internet. Regardless of the medium, all eyes will be on the man of the hour Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the Finance Minister, as he delivers his much awaited presentation at about 3pm tomorrow.

So, what will it be? I'm sure everyone will be hoping that the Budget will have something good for him or her. The same goes for members in the local information and communications technology industry, who must be praying for an ICT-friendly Budget that will help to further spark the industry's growth, enabling it to be more resilient in these challenging times. ICT-friendly in the sense that there will be more incentives in the form of policies and tax breaks to further boost the technology sector and encourage the adoption of ICT, particularly in key growth areas.

Well, these past few weeks, a lot have been said about the need to ensure Malaysia remains the preferred destination for investments, in view of challenges from regional markets such as China, which are becoming more attractive for foreign players. All these undoubtedly require counter-measures, meaning more incentives to attract foreign investors, including those in the ICT field. It should be interesting to see whether Budget 2003 considers tax rate reduction and other incentives.

At the same time, the Prime Minister has also continuously called upon the local small and medium enterprises to become more competitive in view of the impending globalisation. More perks for this group to encourage them to utilise ICT more?

And what about the man-on-the-street? Will there be more incentives for him or her to embrace ICT, in line with the nation's knowledge economy plans?

By tomorrow evening, all these questions will be duly answered.