

'Raise taxes on cigarettes and luxury items instead'

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MINGGUAN Malaysia's columnist Awang Selamat acknowledges that paying income tax is every Malaysian's responsibility but appealed for taxes to be reduced, especially for those in the lower income group.

He said a reasonable option to do would be for the Government to raise taxes on cigarettes, alcohol and luxury items in the Budget 2004.

"In last year's Budget, taxes for these items were not raised although the Government had warned that smoking and drinking had adverse effects on one's health," he added.

Awang said the Government should not be "too generous" to smokers and drinkers in the coming year, adding that Malaysia was one of the few countries in the world where cigarettes were sold at cheaper prices.

"On the other hand, the Government could reduce or abolish taxes that affect a large sector of the community. How about abolishing road taxes for privately-owned vehicles?" he asked.

Awang said many expect the Budget to be an "election budget," while others expect a windfall as it would be the last

budget to be tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad before he steps down next month.

"If it is a windfall we expect, we hope that it will be in the form of tax reduction," he added.

Berita Minggu reported that the Government would be highlighting the successes of non-Malay police personnel to lure more Chinese and Indians to join the police force.

The paper quoted National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman as saying that the move would change the perception that prospects in the uniformed body were low, resulting in lack of interest among the non-Malays.

"What is important is professionalism and teamwork. This will help maintain the unity and harmony enjoyed by all Malaysians," she said.

The paper also reported that Bukit Aman management deputy director Datuk Talib Jalam had recently said that Chinese youths' refusal to join the force made it difficult to station police personnel in areas with large Chinese communities.