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Budget-Reaction (Ministers)

THE DOCTOR DELIVERS FOR HEALTH

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 12 (Bernama) -- "The Doctor delivers for health" is how Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng described the 2004 Budget which was tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the Dewan Rakyat today.

Chua said he was very happy that almost nine per cent of the development allocation was for the health sector, while the Ministry was also given eight per cent of the total expenditure for 2004.

"We are very happy with this allocation, which is an increase of 20 per cent compared to the last Budget. We thank the Prime Minister for giving so much to the health sector.

"People can see how caring the Prime Minister is based on the amount given for the health sector this time around. The doctor has really delivered for health," he told reporters at Parliament House today.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said the Budget was historic as it was the longest one ever made so far.

The MCA President said the Budget took into account various aspects, like stimulating domestic economy, improving the services sector and increasing the country's competitiveness while, at the same time, continuing the policy of a caring society.

"We also welcome the Government's step to focus on small and medium industries," he said.

Ong said many incentives had been given in the Budget, especially with the Government considering single mothers, the disabled and the elderly in the allocation of low-cost housing.

"I am also happy that finally, Syarikat Perumahan Negara Berhad will take over abandoned low-cost housing projects," he said.

The Government's decision to reduce interest rates on loans for skills training was also hailed by Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn.

He said the decision would allow more school leavers and university graduates to apply for programmes and courses to develop skills.

"We are also happy that the Budget will increase the chances for the disabled to obtain employment. Apart from that, the Ministry will ensure that more child-care centres are provided at work as well as the creation of work environments which is more conducive," he said.

The accolades also came from Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir who said it had considered the needs of all parties in the country.

"This Budget is a new direction, a paradigm shift so that we can overcome any problems in the future," he said.

Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said in general, the 2004 Budget was balanced, which was good for the country's future.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim, meanwhile, considered the Budget the most detailed ever presented by any Finance Minister.

"I think this could go into the Guinness Book of Records as the longest speech ever delivered, and I think it should be made into a book and be distributed in schools and institutions of higher learning," he said.

The Budget strategy, to move the country's dependence from foreign investments to domestic products, was a paradigm shift in approach and

thinking, said Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

He said the shift was necessary for the Government and the private sector to actualise proposals in the Budget.

Parents with disabled children should also pay attention to incentives in the Budget, National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said.

"This incentive by the Government should help parents to ensure their (disabled) children will not be left out of mainstream society," she said.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Budget would help realise programmes to modernise the Armed Forces and took their welfare into account with the RM400 million housing allocation.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, who is also Works Minister, said the 2004 Budget paved the way for the private sector to steer the country's economy, which was previously driven by the Government.

"It is a Budget which wants the private sector to take the helm of the country's economy. It also consolidates our fiscal measures and is a balanced Budget," he said.

He said policies could also be implemented as the Government had allocated the necessary funds for certain projects apart from improving the country's competitiveness to truly make it a trading nation.

The Budget, while giving the private sector an opportunity to take over the running of the country's economy, also took care of the people, was PPP President Datuk M. Kayveas' view.

"The Budget also gives the underprivileged some relief. It shows that the Government cares for the people. We hope the benefits given to retirees would be extended to all, not only to retired civil servants," he said.

The Budget, reflecting the Government's view that the nation's economy should be domestically generated without relying on foreign direct investments, would enable the country to be economically self-sufficient like Korea and Japan, he said.

Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishamuddin Tun Hussein said the RM657.9 million allocation for his Ministry allowed for the development of the nation's sports and the provision of scholarships to excellent athletes for their education and to further their careers as coaches and sports managers.

"The facilities which will be developed will benefit the public," he said.

Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, meanwhile, said she felt blessed that her Ministry had been provided with all the things it had strived to achieve for womenkind.

She said the RM100 million allocation for the Rural Credit Scheme and 20 per cent discount for single mothers to buy low-cost houses was expected to help some 130,000 women.

The RM128.6 million allocation to the Ministry to continue women and family development programmes, was 30 per cent more than that announced last year, she said in a statement tonight.

Shahrizat also welcomed the children's tax relief, increased to RM1,000 from RM800, which would lessen the burdens for family expenditure and help parents save for their children's education and health.

The proposal to make child-care centres a development order under local authorities was also welcomed as it would allow working parents to concentrate on their jobs without worrying about their offspring, she said.

She said the move to extend the derivative pension and the gratuity of retired civil servants upon their death to one of their parents was also welcomed.

-- BERNAMA

AT SNS MUN EMK SRI