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Dr M certain private sector will play role

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad dismissed popular talk that the Budget 2004 would be a "farewell" one in which he would "thank" Malaysians for supporting his administration.

"It's not my money. I can't show gratitude to the people by spending the Government's money. I don't do that sort of thing," he said at a Press conference after tabling Budget 2004 in Parliament.

It took the Prime Minister three hours to table the Budget, which was generous to the man-on-the-street, students, the disabled and single mothers.

Budget 2004, amounting to RM112.5 billion, is 1.6 per cent less than last year's budget of RM114.3 billion.

With an estimated revenue of RM95.6 billion, the Federal deficit is expected to be lowered to 3.3 per cent of the gross domestic product, compared to 5.4 per cent of GDP last year.

Asked if the Government was confident of economic growth despite the reduced budget, Dr Mahathir said the private sector would play its role in contributing to growth.

"We're confident that the private sector will make up for the reduction in budget. It is also a reduction that we prioritised. We focused on what was important that could contribute to growth," the Finance Minister said.

Dr Mahathir added that the Government was aiming to achieve a balanced budget by 2006.

However, he said the Government's spending had to match the private sector's and hence, Budget 2004 contained measures that would stimulate private sector growth.

"If the private sector doesn't respond, then Government spending will continue to be in a deficit.

"If the private sector responds, then we may be able to achieve a balanced budget earlier ...it could be 2005," he said.