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## Leaders surprised by comprehensive presentation

THE Budget 2004 presented by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad caught the country's leaders by surprise as it has been described as the longest and most comprehensive Budget presentation ever in the country.

MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting described it as comprehensive, giving incentives, encouragement and aid to people from all walks of life besides boosting small- and medium-scale industries.

"This increases the competitiveness of the country and it is in line with what the Prime Minister has been saying to make Malaysia a trade-based country.

"Incentives, as given to the service and tourism sectors, those in the lower-income group and the disabled in terms of allowances, tax exemptions besides catering to their housing needs, can also increase domestic investment," said Ong, who is also the Housing and Local Government Minister. "Overall, this is a Budget which takes into account the goal to make Malaysia a trade-based country," he said.

MIC president and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the Budget would benefit and improve the lives of those in lower-income groups.

"The Budget, with RM6 billion allocated to the Works Ministry to improve our infrastructure and roads, shows the Barisan Nasional Government cares about and pays attention to basic facilities. It is viewed as important to bring progress to the country," he said.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, in sharing the sentiments as other leaders, said the Budget would help generate income for the local industry and create big export potential.

"The allocation to promote the development of women and the handicapped are encouraging as these would help give greater confidence and independence," said Dr Lim, who is also the Primary Industries Minister.

He said the Government also paid due attention to the promotion of education among the underprivileged.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said Budget 2004 was the best Budget he had ever heard, giving new direction for Malaysia to reach greater heights.

"There are new directions and a paradigm shift that is significant. If all is implemented properly, our country will be stronger and progress more in all fields," he said.

He said although there were no increases in allocation for the ministry, the Budget included plans to change certain policies related to the tourism sector that would make them more effective.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said the Budget was a caring one, especially the incentives given to the disabled and single mothers. He also said it was an all-round Budget and would benefit the country in many ways.

Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said she thanked Dr Mahathir on behalf of all the women in Malaysia for the policies this year and the caring Budget announced.

"More important is that under his leadership, women in Malaysia have done well and as he himself said, we are able to stand tall not only in the national arena but the international one as well. I think that is priceless," she said.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim

said this was the longest and the most detailed Budget ever presented by any Finance Minister since he became an MP in 1974.

"This is a Budget which would portray the image of Dr Mahathir for years to come," he said.

Rais said specifically, the Budget was a goodbye Budget for the Prime Minister.

"This is Dr Mahathir's best ever Budget even under very trying circumstances the country is undergoing. There is a bit for everyone including single mothers, the handicapped, students and workers."