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Thumbs-up from State Government leaders

THE Budget 2004 received all-round thumbs-up from State Government leaders, who described it as all-encompassing, futuristic and people friendly, among others.

In Penang, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon described it as "pragmatic" and "caring".

"From an economic standpoint, the emphasis placed on boosting the growth of small- and medium-sized industries is welcome," he said at the Penang Development Corporation office in Bayan Baru.

The emphasis on women's welfare, development of youth and the needs of the disabled and pensioners, were commendable.

He also said Penang would piggy-back on national efforts to promote the tourism sector aggressively.

In Johor Baru, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said the State capital now had the potential to be the new financial hub of the region following the announcement that financial institutions operating offshore banking facilities in Labuan were now allowed to open branches.

"This announcement is most significant for Johor because it will give us the capabilities to be a regional financial hub, which is a plus factor to our transportation hub at the Port of Tanjung Pelepas and Sultan Ismail International Airport," he said at his official residence yesterday.

In Kuantan, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob described the Budget as an invaluable parting gift from Dr Mahathir to the rakyat before he steps down next month.

He said the Budget was people-friendly and would benefit Malaysians from all walks of life, especially those from the rural areas and the lower-income group.

In Kangar, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said it was an all-encompassing and futuristic Budget.

"To me, it is the best Budget so far as it provides incentives for the rural poor, the disabled and to those in the mainstream of the nation's economic development," said Shahidan.

In Alor Star, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said incentives for the tourism and agriculture sectors would greatly benefit the State.

Characterising the Budget as the rakyat's Budget, Syed Razak said Kedah's economic development depended on its agricultural sector namely food production, adding that any incentives in this area would be welcomed.

Syed Razak said incentives in tourism would also help Kedah realise its plan to develop a hub for haj pilgrims coming from Southern Thailand and Sumatra.

In Seremban, Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Samad said the people-friendly Budget reflected the capabilities and credibility of the present Government under the leadership of Dr Mahathir.

The people must remain competitive and be able to think positively in order to maintain economic growth for stability of the country, he added.

In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman said the RM5.9 billion allocation for the State would allow the development of more infrastructure projects.

"There is also emphasis on developing domestic direct investment. This is timely as we have many local products, like garden furniture in Sabah,

which can be produced not only for the local market, but the international market as well."

He also welcomed the move to raise to 100 per cent the pioneer status income tax exemption for companies in Sabah as it would further develop the industrial sector.

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said it was a balanced Budget which would help spur economic growth, especially in rural areas.

He said the State Government especially welcomed the many incentives offered for research and development activities and allocations for tourism promotion.