

Good to understand the Budget

Random survey of ordinary Malaysians shows that many don't know and don't care

ABOUT two weeks ago, the Prime Minister unveiled the 2016 Budget at Parliament.

I had never been really concerned about the national budget until I started exercising my right to vote a few years ago, which happened around the same time I was transferred to the News & Current Affairs Department at a previous job.

Year after year, I'd be among those who would free up my schedule just so I could watch the budget announcement live.

While most of my chums would dedicate their time to watching live football matches or F1 races, no one wanted to join me for an afternoon live telecast of the Budget.

"It's the same thing year after year anyway, Daph," says A.

"There's nothing for people like us," laments another friend.

Some of my acquaintances aren't even aware of the Budget.

Some seem to think it's just about the GST – "GST is already implemented, nothing much we can do, right?"

It got me thinking about other Malaysians out there.

Are they aware of what the Budget entails and how it could help them?

I then took it to the streets and interviewed random folk, asking them for their views.

I was surprised that out of the 30 Malaysians that I interviewed within those two hours, 20 did not know much about the Budget.

Five of them said they did not care and had an almost nonchalant

attitude towards it.

Among those who had read or watched the announcement – most were okay with it but they were concerned about the mechanism and know-hows.

Two were vehemently against it. When asked why, she answered, "because now I have to pay more in taxes!"

Another couldn't answer specifically and I personally felt it was because he was rooting for the other side, so anything proposed by the current administration, is opposed.

As for me, I am agreeable with the Budget 2016 as a whole.

For starters, I welcome the increase of the tax relief to RM2,000 from RM1,000 for each child under the age of 18 years.

There is also the introduction of a new tax relief of RM1,500 for a taxpayer's mother and RM1,500 for the father to ease expenditure in caring for parents.

The proposal to intensify the development in Sabah and Sarawak is another goodie for us from Sabah and Sarawak; from the construction of the toll-free Pan-Borneo Highway to interest-free loans under BSN to build long houses and enhancing services of 1Malaysia Mobile clinics in the interior areas of Sabah and Sarawak including procurement of new boats and vehicles.

On top of that, economy class on Rural Air services will be exempted from GST and RM260mil will be allocated for the 1Price 1Sarawak and 1Price 1Sabah programme.



College students watching live telecast of Budget 2016 at their college in George Town, Penang. —filepic

In a previous article, I wrote about my traffic woes and raised the possibility of implementing a more comprehensive public transportation system, especially for Greater Kuala Lumpur.

So I am happy to know that a huge budget has been allocated to improve and implement a more efficient public transportation system, including the MRT line 1 and 2 as well as the LRT line 3, which will benefit two million commuters.

I also touched on improving Internet penetration, especially in rural areas in my last article.

Some RM1.2bil will be distributed to implement and upgrade rural broadband projects, National Fibre Backbone infrastructure and undersea cable system – the latter

crucial in ensuring Sabah and Sarawak have access to high-speed broadband. Yay!

However, I do have some questions and reservations.

One of the questions I have with regards to the new tax relief for children contributing to their parents' welfare is this: if all siblings help pay for our parents' well-being, does this mean we all qualify for the relief?

I checked treasury.gov.my and was admittedly a bit disappointed when I read that this relief can be shared with other siblings provided that the total relief claimed shall not exceed RM1,500 for a mother and RM1,500 for a father.

But better some form of relief than none.

Another is the loan repayment period extended to locals to build the long house as their residence.

Most of the Rungus people living there work as farmers.

The zero-interest loan will help definitely, but will they be able to pay their premiums on time? And how many years repayment scheme is offered?

Finally, I have to agree with some quarters about being serious on removing discretionary spending and to eliminate leakages and wastage.

While I applaud the initiatives to provide affordable homes for the lower-income group, I do hope that the quality of materials used is not compromised to profit other parties.

Repairs will only further burden the new homeowners if substandard work is conducted just to "save cost".

Perhaps the idea to consolidate overlapping agencies can help reduce expenditure?

All in all, my general view of the proposed Budget is good.

It is just the reassurance that all monies allocated will be distributed and managed efficiently so there is transparency and no unnecessary spending.

Daphne is compiling her answers about the Budget 2016 on her online show Daphne. Catch the first episode on www.youtube.com/daphneiking. If you have any feedback about the Budget 2016, please email her at daphneiking6@gmail.com