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56:

MAHATHIR

JOHORE BAHRU, AUG. 16 (BERNAMA) -- ASEAN IS TO CALL ON JAPAN TO RELAX HER IMPORT RESTRICTIONS ON CANNED PINEAPPLES FROM THE REGION, FOOD INDUSTRIES OF MALAYSIA (FIMA) CHAIRMAN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMED SAID TODAY.

MALAYSIA WOULD INITIATE TALKS BETWEEN ASEAN COUNTRIES AND JAPAN ON THE MATTER, DR. MAHATHIR, WHO IS ALSO EDUCATION MINISTER, SAID.

HE SAID JAPAN HAD THIS YEAR IMPOSED FURTHER RESTRICTIONS ON THE IMPORT CANNED PINEAPPLES TO PROTECT HER OWN PINEAPPLE INDUSTRY IN OKINAWA ALTHOUGH MALAYSIAN PINEAPPLES WERE CHEAPER.

DR. MAHATHIR WAS SPEAKING TO REPORTERS AFTER SIGNING A JOINT WAGES AGREEMENT WITH THE MALAYSIA CAN BRANCH OF THE METAL INDUSTRIES UNION AT PEKAN NANAS, ABOUT 26 MILES FROM HERE.

HE ALSO DISCLOSED THAT LAST YEAR THE WHOLLY GOVERNMENT OWNED PINEAPPLES CANNERY OF MALAYSIA SDN. BHD. EXPORTED ABOUT 1.2 MILLION CASES OF CANNED PINEAPPLES BUT IT EXPECTED TO EXPORT ONLY 750,000 CASES THIS YEAR. -- BERNAMA MORE 1733/ZCM

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EXPORTS LAST YEAR AVERAGED ABOUT 100,000 CARTONS A MONTH COMPARED WITH AN AVERAGE OF 50,000 CARTONS PER MONTH SO FAR THIS YEAR - A DECREASE OF 50 PER CENT AS A RESULT OF DETERIORATING MARKETS OVERSEAS.

DR. MAHATHIR ALSO SAID FIMA WAS REVIEWING THE POSITION OF ITS SECOND PINEAPPLE CANNERY IN PULAU SEBATANG (PONTIAN) WHICH WAS NOW AT A VERY LOW PRODUCTION LEVEL.

THE FACTORY MIGHT BE CONVERTED FOR THE CANNING OF OTHER FOOD-STUFF, HE ADDED.

HE SAID THE MAIN PINEAPPLE CANNERY AT PEKAN NANAS WAS CAPABLE OF COPING WITH THE PRESENT DEMAND.

PCM MIGHT FACE LOSSES IF IT CONTINUED TO OPERATE THE SECOND FACTORY WITHOUT ANY CHANGE, HE EXPLAINED. -- BERNAMA MORE 1737/ZCM

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DR. MAHATHIR, WHO IS ALSO THE CHAIRMAN OF PCM, SAID SMALLHOLDERS WERE GROWING LESS PINEAPPLES NOW BUT HE HOPED THAT THEY WOULD INCREASE PRODUCTION WHEN THE MARKET PICKED UP AGAIN.

DR. MAHATHIR LATER SIGNED A SIMILAR WAGES AGREEMENT WITH THE PCM BRANCH OF THE FOOD INDUSTRIES UNION.

BOTH PCM AND MALAYSIA CAN ARE SUBSIDIARIES OF FIMA. -- BERNAMA 1738/ZCM