

20/08/1997

Dr M: Cut import of heavy machinery

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KUCHING, Tues. - The Government will be forced to impose restrictions on imports, especially of heavy machinery for the construction industry, if traders do not reduce them voluntarily, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Dr Mahathir said he was saddened by the attitude of traders especially those dealing with machinery.

"Because they have the money, they import unnecessary things, especially construction machinery like mechanical hose and excavators.

"Although the new machinery are still good, they still import new machines.

"If you keep this bad habit, the deficit will remain. We must realise that this deficit is a national problem and will affect the traders themselves.

"At the moment all they see is the fact that they can sell these things and make quick profits," Dr Mahathir said when asked whether the 1998 Budget proposal would contain new measures to reduce imports which contributed to the balance of payments deficit. Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters at the Kuching International Airport at the end of his two-day visit to Sarawak.

He said these traders were causing an increase in the balance of payments deficit.

"They must co-operate because when we don't have a problem in the balance of payments, the economy will grow faster and they will get better benefits.

"But they only see short-term profits and go on promoting new machines."

Dr Mahathir said big projects would continue despite efforts by "international crooks" to undermine the country's economy.

"They (the projects) will be implemented in a way which takes into consideration the sabotage that has been carried out by these international crooks.

"These are international crooks who are trying to sabotage us.

"Of course they say I am rather intemperate in my views, but I am dealing with crooks so I have to be intemperate. People who rob the poor are not the best kind of people.

"They are not even Robin Hoods. At least Robin Hood robbed from the rich to give to the poor but these people rob from the poor to enrich the rich.

"They have millions of dollars already. They cheated the British Government of STG2 billion (RM8.86 billion) I think they should settle down and prepare themselves for their future lives in the other world.

"Please write that. Don't be afraid. If they sue (you), I will be quite willing to appear in court."

Dr Mahathir also dismissed claims that Ekran Berhad, the proponent of the RM15 billion Bakun Hydroelectric Dam project in Sarawak, wanted to withdraw from the project.

"There is no truth to the rumour," he said.

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