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Mahathir-budget

MAHATHIR:GOVT MAY RESTRICT IMPORT OF HEAVY MACHINERIES

KUCHING, Aug 19 (Bernama) -- Prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the government may restrict import of heavy machineries in the 1998 Budget proposals to be tabled in Parliament in October.

He said continuous importation of machineries such as cranes, excavators, and bulldozers had contributed significantly to the deficit in the country's balance of payment.

"The traders must realise that this deficit is a national problem and it will affect the traders themselves later on," he said at a press conference at the end of his two-day visit to Sarawak.

He said despite the huge number of heavy machineries already in the country, traders were still importing them.

"In Kuching alone, you can see yards full of these things (heavy machineries) and yet they are still buying and if we keep on with our bad habit the deficit will never go away," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the traders could now sell the machineries and make profit for themselves, thus also contributing to reducing the country's deficit.

"At the moment we want traders to volunteer to stop importing the machineries but if they don't, we are thinking of putting restrictions on the import," he said.

When asked further what restrictions the government would enforce, Dr Mahathir said he would have to consult the finance minister.

Dr Mahathir said all projects already planned would be not be deferred or cancelled.

"We manage our finances well, except that there are financial crooks trying to sabotage us...of course they said (what they are doing) is normal trading but if that happens to their country it will not be normal," he said.

He said the action of George Soros, who Dr Mahathir had named as the person behind the speculative attacks on the ringgit, was worse than what Robin Hood had done.

"At least Robin Hood robbed the rich to help the poor, but this person robbed the poor to enrich the rich," he said.

The prime minister said Soros should go for retirement and prepare for his future instead of continuing to sabotage Asean currencies.

"At least after robbing Britain of two billion pounds, they (the speculators) should prepare for their future life... in the other world," he added. -- BERNAMA

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