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M'SIA SHOWS EXPORT SURPLUS DESPITE CURRENCY ATTACK

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says that there has been a definite increase in Malaysia's exports despite the recent speculative attacks on the ringgit.

"We have taken steps from the very beginning and that is why you can see that this year's results showed a surplus in exports over imports," he told reporters after launching Malaysia's first national truck, "HICOM Perkasa" here today.

Malaysia reported a trade surplus of RM1.2 billion in September this year compared with RM1.15 million in August this year and RM652.98 million in September 1996.

Dr Mahathir also said if not for the currency attack, which saw the ringgit fall by almost 30 percent since July, Malaysia would have reduced the country's trade deficit by a very high percentage.

"But now, of course...everything that we buy has higher value while what we sell is lower in value. Therefore, it makes a little bit difficult for us to achieve the original target. But we will try to overcome that, and already we saw a surplus in our exports," he said.

The ringgit has fallen almost 30 percent since July, right after the Thai central bank decided to undertake a "managed float" for the Thai baht. Thereafter no Asean currency, not even the Singapore dollar, was spared from attacks from speculators.

Earlier in his speech, the prime minister again stressed the way to tackle the country's current account deficit was not to lower economic growth but by raising exports.

"We know we are facing a deficit and as such we must increase our exports and reduce our imports," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said the government would launch a national drive to involve all citizens from the top corporate executive to the labourer on reviving the country's economy.

Meanwhile, the launch of the national truck today marked the comprehensive involvement of the DRB-HICOM Group in the land transportation industry in the country, not only as manufacturer but also as a marketer, domestically and internationally.

The HICOM Perkasa, designed and manufactured by Malaysian Truck and Bus Sdn Bhd, a member of the DRB-HICOM, ranges from four to seven tonnes. It is for small businesses as well as larger commercial use.

The chairman of the DRB-HICOM Group, Datuk Wira Mohd Saleh Sulong, said the trucks were already being marketed from today.

In Peninsular Malaysia, they will be sold through 68 branches and agents of Automotive Corporation (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd while in Sabah dan Sarawak, they will be sold through 16 branches and agents of Kinabalu Motors.

Mohd Saleh also said DRB-HICOM would raise its exports of Proton to help the country overcome the current account deficit problems.

"We have just exported the Kriss motorcycle and will later export our trucks," he added. --BERNAMA

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