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Provide proof we're in recession, Dr M dares critics

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday challenged critics who claimed the country was already in recession to back up their argument with proof.

He said the Government was not fond of creating lies when it made known growth figures for the first nine months of the year.

"We do not hide anything. These figures are accepted by the whole world. When there is negative growth in the third quarter, we say so. When there is only a 0.5 per cent growth in the second quarter, we say that and did not claim it's 10 per cent.

"It is easy to make claims but provide proof that we are wrong," he said after tabling the 2002 Budget at the Dewan Negara.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, was asked about a claim by Abdul Rahman Yusof (Keadilan-Kemaman) in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday that the economy was already in recession following two consecutive negative growth in the second and third quarters.

The MP claimed the Government, in wanting to protect its position, had misled the people by making public more favourable growth figures.

Dr Mahathir said he believed a positive growth for this year was within reach.

"We need to grow a little bit (fourth quarter) and we will achieve positive growth this year."

He said favourable signs could be seen in many areas such as the higher export for October, bigger consumption and the return of tourists.

On the RM7.3 billion fiscal packages announced in March and September, Dr Mahathir said he believed the funds would contribute to economic growth.

He said although provisions had been made to utilise the money, there might be some shortfall because of weaknesses by the implementation agencies.

Asked how much of the RM7.3 billion had been spent, Dr Mahathir said: "I think it is around RM3 billion plus but by year-end, more will be spent as we will be paying for contracts already completed."

Asked to comment on his Budget speech calling the people to protect unity and solidarity, he said the matter was given emphasis because of attempts by certain groups bent on destroying peace enjoyed in the country.

He said these groups, who studied in Afghanistan, wanted to replace the Government through violence.

Dr Mahathir said although some members of the groups had been arrested, there were others still at large.

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