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Mahathir-containers

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PORT KLANG, March 12 (Bernama) -- The government will issue more licences for container haulage if the service provided by the four existing companies is found to be unsatisfactory, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The government would keep a close watch on the performance of these container hauliers, he told reporters after launching MISC Haulage Services Sdn Bhd and its palm oil bulk carrier +Bunga Siantan+ on its maiden voyage, here.

The other three companies providing container haulage service are Kontena Nasional, Shapadu Holdings and Konsortium Perkapalan.

In his speech earlier, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the MISC was allowed to engage in container haulage after taking into account its position as the biggest shipping company in the country and the large number of containers it handled.

+The volume of container cargo moving through the ports of Malaysia has risen sharply in recent years and the three companies before MISC, despite having expanded their handling capacity, find it difficult to fully meet the increasing demand,+ he said. -- more

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He also said that while the government was proud to see MISC diversifying its activities by venturing into haulage on land, it was important that container haulage be made an efficient service to enhance the competitive edge of Malaysian exports.

The prime minister also reminded of the importance of the growth of the merchant fleet in line with the nation's commercial demands so that Malaysia did not depend on the services of foreign shipping.

Uncoordinated growth would lead to a greater demand for foreign shipping services, and this would adversely affect the nation's economy because much of the costs of commercial activities would have to go towards foreign shipping and insurance services, he added.

In this context, he said, the registration of vessels in Malaysia should be stepped up to save on foreign exchange, and remove dependence on foreign shipping and insurance services.

He also said that in line with the policy to make Malaysia a maritime nation, the government would continue to focus on the provision of support services such as training, repair and overhaul of vessels, and development of ports to enable the country's shipping industry to grow in a competitive environment. -- more

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Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir called on owners of vessels to consider increasing the number of trained local seamen so that the country would not run short of them.

He said that Malaysia in particular and the Asean countries in general could be expected to become a source of trained seamen in view of their shortage in the developed countries and the high cost of engaging them.

He said he saw no reason why Malaysian vessels could not be handled by Malaysians themselves as Malaysia had a maritime tradition, and added that in several countries the income of seamen was a vital source of national revenue. -- Bernama

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