

# PM calls for co-operation to boost ports

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said everyone involved in transporting cargo at the country's seaports should co-operate with each other to clear the congestion, instead of blaming each other.

The Prime Minister said they must work together to remove the bottlenecks that led to the congestion in the first place.

He said that there was a need to develop an effective system to facilitate the movement of goods at the ports which everyone could follow so that there would be no problems.

Dr Mahathir said: "We must be prepared to make sacrifices in order to follow a system and then everybody will benefit.

"You start blaming the other party, the other party starts blaming you ... it's not going to be good," the Prime Minister said when asked by reporters to comment on a special report in the *New Sunday Times* today on the congestion at the country's seaports.

The report said that the lack of co-ordination is costing the country billions of ringgit in lost opportunities every year and has resulted in port congestion arising from bottlenecks which are driving away business.

Dr Mahathir said if everybody — the Customs, freight forwarders, shippers and port operators — co-operated, then the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) would help facilitate the movement of goods through the ports.

The nation's three major

seaports — Port Klang, Penang and Pasir Gudang, Johor — are congested most of the time. That being the case, a large portion of cargo is now trucked to and from, and handled, in Singapore.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after opening the MIC's special convention at the Putra World Trade Centre here. He said at present RM52 billion worth of Malaysian goods were being shipped through Singapore.

He also reiterated his call for Port Klang, the country's premier port, to be used as a central distribution point for the whole nation.

"Why can't the goods be shipped through Port Klang which is now a free port? It should be shipped through Port Klang but people are just not co-operating."

What was required was for co-operation from the people who produce, export and import the goods to use Port Klang, the Prime Minister said.

If there were goods in Port Klang then the ships would come, but not when those involved sent their goods elsewhere, he said.

"It's not that we are jealous of Singapore ... but it's our goods. It's a source of income and it will reduce our invisibles. The balance of invisibles will be in our favour if we ship through Port Klang," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said Port Klang's capacity as a major port had also been increased with the six kilometre-wharves at the new West Port which was more than

sufficient to handle any number of ships coming into the port, no matter how big they were.

Asked if he had asked for a report on the problems of congestion at the ports, Dr Mahathir said he received regular reports, especially after the privatisation of Port Klang, as he wanted to know whether there had been an improvement in its operations.

He said: "There was considerable improvement. Turnaround time and all that has improved but it is still not as efficient as we would like it to be."

Asked if he would be making a personal visit to the ports, Dr Mahathir said he thought Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik was doing a good job and it was not necessary for him to do so.

In Bukit Mertajam, Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim also commented on port congestion.

He urged port authorities, government agencies and the private sector involved in cargo handling to be more innovative and work towards making Malaysian port efficiency comparable to the best in the world.

Anwar said that with increased volume of cargo handled there was a pressing need to further improve.

He said the Government would take necessary measures to help overcome the problem, including liberalising container haulage operations if necessary.

Anwar said, however, that there has been improvement in cargo handling.