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Mahathir-Port

UTILISE PORT KLANG FULLY, DR M TELLS IMPORTERS AND EXPORTERS

PORT KLANG, Jan 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reiterated his call to local importers and exporters to fully utilise Port Klang to reduce the deficit in the country's balance of payment.

The Prime Minister said the government wanted to see Port Klang handling all the imports and exports of Malaysia.

Noting that Malaysia might not be able to achieve this 100 percent, he said the country would certainly work towards this goal.

"This has become more important today simply because the deficit in the balance of payment is growing, and one of the contributors to the deficit is the fact that our invisible trade accrues largely to foreign countries and not to Malaysia," he said.

Speaking at the launching of the Orient Overseas Container Line (OOCL) Direct Trans-Pacific Service from Port Klang to the U.S. West Coast, he said freight and insurance were among the items that contributed to the deficit.

"It is therefore reasonable to expect us to make more use of our ports, if possible our own ships and our own insurance companies," he said.

He said companies exporting from and importing into Malaysia should take interest in how their goods were being exported or how they received goods.

Dr Mahathir said the government would be doing "some mild arm twisting" to make sure that people send and receive their goods through Port Klang.

He said Malaysians were not that concerned about how their exports or imports reach or leave this country.

"They handed over to handling agents who then sent most of the goods to a neighbouring country and, as a result, we become merely a feeder port," he said.

In a bid to make Port Klang more attractive, the government has decided to make it a free port where goods can come here and be re-exported without being taxed at all if they do not cross the customs barrier.

"This is to facilitate importation of bulk goods in order to be re-packed and re-exported to other places," he said.

He said many things remained to be done to ensure Port Klang could serve the many purposes it was intended for.

He was happy that shipping companies, including the OOCL, which has brought its biggest container vessel the "OOCL California" to Port Klang, had responded well to the government's efforts to increase the use of this port.

Dr Mahathir said the government wanted to ensure sufficient freight to make it worthwhile for such big ships to come here.

"And, the government will do everything possible to see that Malaysian goods are directed to Port Klang so that there will be sufficient amount of goods and containers to fill the huge ships so that their visits here are worthwhile," he said.

He said the government would study ways to further cut costs.

He said: "We are very happy indeed to receive complaints and suggestions from port users as it is the Malaysian government's policy to be open to suggestions.

"If Malaysia has been able to grow quite fast lately it is because of our policy of listening to the people and their complaints."

He said Port Klang started off as Port Swettenham, a small port which

was not designed for ships which go direct to other continents but rather as a feeder port.

He said the British policy in those days was more towards developing Singapore and as a result everything was done to ensure that Port Klang would not develop.

For example, freight charge for bringing goods from Kuala Lumpur to Port Swettenham then was higher than the freight charge for taking goods from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore.

"It was one of the decisions made during the British period...another result of that policy was the decision to destroy Melaka in order to make Penang develop. Those were the days when the decision making was out of our hands."

After years of independence, it was now our intention to develop Port Klang as the main port of this country and over time one of the biggest in the region, he added.

OOCL is one of the largest container operators in the world providing customers with global, fully integrated containerised transportation services with a vast network encompassing Trans-Pacific, Trans-Atlantic, Far East/Europe, Far East/Australia, Far East/Middle East and Intra-Asia.

The OOCL California, the first of OOCL's eight new container ships with a capacity of 4960 TEUs, will provide Malaysian exporters and importers direct liner call between Malaysia and the US West Coast.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhamad Taib and Klang Port Authority Chairman Datuk Michael Chen, was given a guided tour of the ship by Encik C.C. Tung, the vice-president of Orient Overseas International Limited, the parent company of OOCL. --  
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