

04 DEC 1997

Mahathir-Maritime

TURN TO LESS LABOUR-INTENSIVE WAYS, MAHATHIR TELLS MARITIME INDUSTRY

LANGKAWI, Dec 4 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged the private sector to look into technological innovations that could make the maritime industry less labour-intensive in turning Malaysia, once renowned for its seafarers like Panglima Awang, into a true maritime nation.

Commending the navy for its "Smart Ship" concept which has reduced operational costs, the prime minister said the private sector should look into the possibility of incorporating more IT-based technology and automation in line with Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor project.

He said the healthy growth in the maritime industry implied a tremendous pressure on the limited human resources in the industry where not only was recruiting the right candidate a problem, but retaining trained personnel in sea-related careers was even more problematic.

"Though we were once renowned seafarers, as portrayed by Panglima Awang or Henry the Black who, along with Magellan, circumnavigated the globe, unfortunately we have somehow lost this trait.

"The long years under colonial rule have perhaps made us landlubbers with a distinct dislike for being away from home for any length of time," the prime minister said when opening the First International Maritime Conference onboard the M.V. Star Pisces, here.

The conference is being held in conjunction with the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (Lima) '97 show which entered its third day today.

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia had all the makings of a maritime nation, being strategically located at the centre of shipping land and with a large sea area rich in fishery, oil and gas resources, it had yet to optimise all these attributes to qualify as a maritime nation in the true sense of the word.

He said efforts to transform Malaysia into a true maritime nation began in earnest only about two decades ago and since then the industry had been recognised as an increasingly important sector in the country's economy.

On the navy's "Smart Ship" concept, Dr Mahathir said he was glad to note that the navy was now seriously looking into it.

He said the concept had enabled the navy to reduce annual operating costs by about 10 per cent through a reduction in manpower by more than 30 per cent.

The prime minister said the number and capacity of local shipbuilding and repair yards had also increased manifold to cope with the rising level of activities.

The acquisition of new assets and the eventual launch of the navy's patrol vessels project were expected to further stimulate shipbuilding and ship repair activities while enhancing indigenous technical know-how through a comprehensive transfer of technology, he said.

He said that in this field of high technology, it was hoped that the navy would play a more significant role in initiating warship design, building and repairs.

This, he said, would eventually enable the development of local capabilities in the field of naval architecture, marine engineering, marine and aerospace communication, defence electronics and systems integration, among others.

Dr Mahathir also gave an assurance on the security situation, saying

that the government would make every effort to ensure that investments are safe and sound.

"Let's not allow the occasional reports of piracy to create an inaccurate impression of the overall security situation of the region. Piracies or robberies at sea are isolated incidents which occur occasionally everywhere," he said.

On maritime-related careers, Dr Mahathir said the government was trying to revive the nation's seafaring culture by inculcating maritime values among schoolchildren through extra-curricular activities like sea cadet corps.

As for the youth, Malaysia is now actively embarking on the "Tunas Samudera" sailing programme run by the navy in conjunction with the Youth and Sports and the Education ministries. -- BERNAMA

MOK/ES JK