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## Container depot boost for Malaysia-Thai cargo

Kang Siew Li in Songkhla

SONGKHLA, Sun: Cargo movements between Malaysia and Thailand received a boost over the weekend with the opening of the RM26 million KPB Sadao Inland Container Depot (ICD) here.

Initiated as part of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) project, the new depot will facilitate efficient customs services and cargo movement between the two countries.

The ICD is a joint cooperation between Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd (KPB) and its Thai partners, Mrs Malee Wanasook and her family. Wanasook is the chairman of KPB Sadao ICD Co Ltd Thailand.

The ICD was opened by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Thai Parliament chairman Wan Muhamad Noor Matha.

It is a product of a joint venture agreement signed between KPB Perkapalan and Wanasook and her family on September 4 1996. However, preparations and construction of the complex took two years.

KPB Sadao ICD Co Ltd was set up with an authorised capital of 60 million baht (100 baht = RM10.50), which is shared among KPB (40 per cent) and its Thai partners (60 per cent).

Konsortium Perkapalan group executive chairman Mirzan Mahathir said the ICD was established primarily to provide traders based in the northern part of Malaysia and southern Thailand with an alternative to importing and exporting products by road.

"Imported cargo coming in by road from Malaysia and Singapore ports can be stored in transit at the ICD or consolidated and ungrouped for transfer to bonded facilities in other parts of Thailand," he said, adding that it will be an excellent facility for bilateral trade in industrial components, food and consumer products.

He said the new depot is the only Thai Customs checkpoint for all containerised cargo to and from Malaysia.

"Currently, cargo traffic (through ICD) is estimated at 6,000 TEUs (20-foot equivalent units) per month, while the estimated volume of trucks is 6,000 per month, and this is expected to increase," he said.

The 34ha facility currently provides a container depot capable of handling reefer containers, a 6,000 sq m warehouse, a dangerous cargo storage area and two weighbridges.

It is located 8km from Bukit Kayu Hitam on the highway to Hat Yai and 14km from Padang Besar.

Dr Ling, speaking to reporters after the opening ceremony, said the ICD is a testimony of cooperation between the Royal Thai Customs Department and the private sector and KPB and its Thai partners.

The ICD is also a good example of cooperation within the ambit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and South-South cooperation.

"It is a good example of regionalism ... it shows our cooperation is not held back by national borders," he added.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Ling said Malaysia and Thailand need to concentrate not just on the infrastructure, but also the operational and documentation aspects for efficient and reliable movement of cargo.

"Although both of our countries are now facing economic difficulties, this should not be an excuse for us to discontinue with beneficial projects.

"Instead it should spur us to work even harder to put into place all the

mechanisms so that when the turnaround comes, we are in a better position," he said.

He cited the ICD as a good example of a supply-driven provision which ensures infrastructure bottlenecks do not occur in the future.

Dr Ling also urged other Thai companies to think regional and consider Malaysia as the place to start their joint ventures.

"I can assure you that the Malaysian Government is very supportive of such productive investments. I believe we in Malaysia are one of the world's business-friendly governments today," he added.

Last year, Malaysia-Thailand trade totalled RM16.6 billion. Malaysia exported goods worth RM7.9 billion and imported Thai goods worth RM8.7 billion.

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