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One-stop shipping agency soon

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LOCAL importers and exporters will need to deal with only one agency in the near future when they encounter problems shipping goods through local ports.

This is because the Government will be setting up a one-stop agency to handle problems relating to the local shipping industry.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the Cabinet agreed on Wednesday to set up the agency as part of efforts to encourage local importers and exporters to ship their goods through Port Klang.

"Committee members of the new one-stop agency will comprise officials from the Transport Ministry, International Trade and Industry Ministry and Treasury," he told reporters after holding an hour-long dialogue with members of the Malaysian-Swedish Business Association at Westport in Port Klang yesterday.

He said the Treasury has been roped in to run the one-stop agency since the Royal Customs and Excise Department and the Immigration Department fall under its jurisdiction.

"We will now get the respective secretaries-general of the ministries to quickly sit down and draw up the structure of the new agency.

"They will decide whether they want to place one of the three ministers (Dr Ling, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Second Finance Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed) to head the new agency or the ministers should co-chair and sit on the committee once every six months.

"They will also decide who should be responsible for the day-to-day running of the one-stop-agency," he said.

Dr Ling said it is unlikely that non-government bodies, such as the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers and the Malaysian National Shipping Council, will be included as committee members in the new agency.

"If they (non-government bodies) have problems or find ways to improve the local shipping industry, they can approach this new agency without needing to sit on the committee.

"The agency is a solution-finding body and therefore should only comprise government agencies," he added.

The idea to set up a one-stop agency to address problems associated with the local shipping industry was first proposed by Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia secretary-general, Tan Sri Soong Siew Hoong, at last Saturday's dialogue between representatives of the shipping industry and the Government.

The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Ling also said to date, there are five inland container depots (ICDs) in the country, which are interlinked with the main ports either by road or rail service.

"The ICDs are located in Ipoh, Nilai, Padang Besar, Sadao (Thailand) and Segamat," he said, adding that the Segamat inland port in Johor will be ready for operations on December 15.

Dr Ling said ICDs are important for investors "because somehow or other, they want to be located close to the ports to facilitate shipping of their goods".

"This was evident in the past when investors would build their factories in places such as Butterworth, Mak Mandin, Prai, Shah Alam, Klang or Pasir

Gudang which are situated near the main ports.

"However, with the existence of ICDs in places such as Ipoh, it has since become one of the preferred locations among investors," he said.

On the RM383 million railway project linking Westport to North Port in Port Klang, Dr Ling said there have been some delays and it is expected to begin operations next January, instead of on December 8 this year.

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