

01/11/1998

Port Klang to be national load centre

Alex Choong

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government has decided to make Port Klang a national load centre while persuading others in the country to be feeder ports.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Port Klang could deal with all West- or East-bound ships as it had the required facilities.

"Port Klang is also strategically located and it has everything that Singapore port can offer," he said, adding that "what Singapore can do, Port Klang can do much better".

To achieve this, the people, particularly importers and exporters, must use Port Klang.

"We are doing our best to make Port Klang a major port in the region," Dr Mahathir told more than 350 participants during a dialogue with port users organised by the Transport Ministry at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Also present were Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Port Klang Authority management staff members and senior management officers of privatised port operators.

Dr Mahathir, who is also First Finance Minister, spoke of the need to conserve and earn more foreign currency by expanding exports and reducing imports.

"Fortunately, our trade balance is stable. As at the end of August, it was RM32 billion compared to only RM0.4 billion last year."

Despite the large trade surplus, Dr Mahathir expressed his concern over the deficit in services account of RM19 billion.

"We have to reduce this deficit and one of the ways is to use our ports as much as possible," he added.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of the early days when Singapore port was considered a strategic gateway.

"Ships going East and West had to pass through Singapore.

"Besides its strategic location, Singapore port also attracted and gathered all products for exports from the surrounding archipelago," he said.

Singapore, he added, also thrived on its entreport trade and served as a load centre for the whole region.

However, he said in view of rapid development in communications, Singapore was no longer strategically located.

"There are many ports in the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia and Port Klang is one of them."

Dr Mahathir admitted that not long ago, Port Klang was also considered a feeder port for Singapore but all that had changed.

"Now we have main line vessels calling at Port Klang.

"These vessels ply to Europe and to the United States," he added.

He said the Government had every confidence that Port Klang would be a national load centre.

"With more cargo coming, I am sure more main line vessels will call at Port Klang."

To encourage the use of Port Klang, Dr Mahathir said the Government had also made it a free port.

(END)