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Mahathir-Ports

MALAYSIA TO TURN PORT KLANG REGIONAL HUB, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, May 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia aims to place Port Klang as the regional hub on par with Singapore, Hong Kong and other international ports.

The government aspired to develop the country into a regional hub for transportation and Port Klang would be promoted as a load centre and transshipment hub, he said opening the 21st World Ports Conference at a hotel here today.

Port Klang, he said, is just a stone's throw from the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and it would certainly benefit from all the new technologies and operations of the MSC.

"We expect practices and innovations in the MSC to contribute to the greater efficiency of Port Klang," Dr Mahathir said.

The MSC is a 750 sq km zone south of here designated as a hub for the development of multimedia products and services.

Dr Mahathir said there was no doubt that the MSC would stimulate the rapid growth of the Malaysian economy.

"It may not generate much by way of freight but indirectly it will result in much greater trade and manufacturing in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government had adopted numerous measures to attract shipping to Port Klang.

These include;

- * relaxing the cabotage policy;
- * relaxing foreign equity requirements in shipping agencies;
- * providing one-stop administrative facilities; and
- * improving total port operating environments.

Dr Mahathir said ports were no longer havens of yesteryear for ships to call and unload goods and to replenish their supplies of victuals and water.

"Today ships can circle the globe without running short of fuel or supplies. If they have to call at ports it is because they have to drop or pick up goods. As such they can pick and choose which ports they need to call at.

"The attractiveness of ports is thus no longer due to strategic locations," he said.

He said with more transactions and activities due to expansion of information technology, ports had now become major commercial centres.

After delivering his keynote address, the prime minister opened a related trade exhibition held in conjunction with the week-long event, organised by the International Association of Ports and Harbours (IAPH).

At a press conference later, the prime minister was asked about the competition that Port Klang would have to face from established ports in the region.

Dr Mahathir said: "If we can run our port efficiently and offer excellent service we too can emerge as the foremost port in the region ... moreover we have a large hinterland to produce and collect goods from."

He said the level of support services in Malaysian ports had improved much.

They were much better than they were a few years ago, he said.

"This has been shown by the rapid increase in the tonnage and the number of containers being handled now," he said.

This is the IAPH's second conference in the region in the last 30

years. The first was held in Singapore in 1975.

Analysts had projected that Malaysian ports would achieve a high growth rate with major ports such as Penang, Port Klang, Kuantan, Kemaman, Pasir Gudang and Bintulu expected to fare better because of their larger hinterland.

Malaysia's newest port, Tanjung Pelepas near Johor Baharu is set to open for business early next year and expected to secure the trans-shipment cargo from Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh tapping part of the growth in regional trans-shipment now monopolised by the Singapore port.

-- BERNAMA

GM AHH RYN