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PM tells port operators to capitalise on IT to grow

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said port operators should capitalise on the vast opportunity for growth by ensuring the needs of users are met.

He said in today's competitive environment, ports must be able to deal with challenges that came with advancements in information technology.

"With IT, more transactions and activities will be centred around the ports and the role of sea transportation and road and rail connections. Obviously exciting years are ahead for the ports of the world," he said today when opening the 21st World Ports conference and exhibition at the Palace of the Golden Horses.

Themed "Global Trade through Port Co-operation", it is organised by the International Association of Ports and Harbours. This is the second time in 24 years the conference is being held in this part of the world, after Singapore in 1975.

Dr Mahathir said there was no doubt there would be many innovations as IT was applied to the management of ports and shipping.

He said Malaysia hoped to keep pace with the developments because it realised the well-being of the economy depended on the ability to adjust to and apply the new technologies.

On the Multimedia Super Corridor which is just a stone's throw away from Port Klang, the country's principal port, Dr Mahathir said the latter would benefit from the new technologies and operations of the MSC.

"We expect IT practices and innovations in the MSC to contribute to greater efficiency in Port Klang."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia aspired to develop into a regional hub for transportation and Port Klang would be promoted as a load centre and trans-shipment hub, to be on par with international ports such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

He said ports were no longer solely for the handling of ships and freight.

"They have become in themselves great commercial centres where all kinds of products are not only being received, unpacked, sorted and repacked, but actual manufacturing for exports are done.

"In the quest for greater trade and economic expansion, more innovative use of ports and the immediate surrounding areas will no doubt be found and developed."

As ships today could circle the globe without running short of fuel or supplies, he said the attractiveness of ports was no longer due to strategic locations.

"They are attractive because they provide efficient and prompt services and their land and sea transportation networks enable them to have the goods delivered to their final destination.

"It is also because they can receive and store the goods coming from different locations and be ready to load them on ships which call in the shortest possible time."

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysian ports could rival other international ports if they were run efficiently, noting that support services had also improved over the years.

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