

13 MAR 2000

Mahathir-Port

DR M: PORT OF TANJUNG PELEPAS WILL BE A CATALYST FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

JOHOR BAHRU, March 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Port of Tanjung Pelepas, the second port in Johor, will be a catalyst for Malaysia's economic growth particularly in south Johor.

He said the RM2.4 billion port would be among the main gateways for the country's trade.

Its rapid growth would also stimulate other port-related activities such as warehousing and manufacturing, he said.

"Generally, the port has no obstacles that could retard its growth. Its strategic location in the middle of the international shipping route is the main asset that could attract shipping companies to use the port," he said when opening the port in Gelang Patah, about 50km from here.

Phase one of the project, with two berths totalling 2.16km in length, started operating last October.

The new container terminal will have six berths when fully developed.

Dr Mahathir said in the government's commitment to ensure the port's success, it had spent more than RM100 million to build roads and about RM600 million to construct railway lines.

With the infrastructure facilities in place, the port would have the best communications system and transportation network, he said.

"With the availability of these facilities, local manufacturers have no excuse not to use local ports particularly this port," he said.

The prime minister said the government had always encouraged development of ports in the country and upgrade their facilities as it was aware that ports played an important role in bolstering the country's economy.

"In fact, in developed countries, the port sector contributed a significant percentage to their national revenue. In this regard, the government has provided certain incentives to improve the port sector," he said.

For the Port of Tanjung Pelepas, he said the government had granted free zone status which provides for dealings within the port area to be exempted from tax, customs duties and other charges.

Through such incentives, the government hoped local ports especially this port could play a role to boost the country's trade, he said.

At the same time, the government also hoped for the cooperation of all sectors particularly local manufacturers to fully use local ports, he said.

He said they should not depend on foreign ports for their imports and exports as local ports could also provide for their needs.

Dr Mahathir said the government was prepared to consider problems related to port services in its efforts to improve the performance of the port sector.

He believed sophisticated infrastructures and modern equipment alone did constitute to world standard facilities.

He said modern port facilities also entailed the high hopes of getting efficient and quality services from officers and staff of companies or government agencies running port operations.

Dr Mahathir said Port of Tanjung Pelepas employees must be well trained to ensure maximum returns from the port's facilities.

Government agencies directly involved in port operations must also improve their service quality, he said.

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He said a success cannot be achieved alone but through a collective effort.

"All of us present here have our own roles to ensure the success of local ports including the Port of Tanjung Pelepas," he said.

He said the people of Malaysia owned the Port of Tanjung Pelepas directly or indirectly as they would be the ones who would enjoy the spin-offs from the port's successful operations.

Dr Mahathir said the port's opening marked another long-term measure by the government to enhance Malaysia's port sector besides reflecting the country's development.

He said the port was among the country's biggest infrastructure projects, proving Malaysians' capabilities in building ports of international standards using futuristic technology.

He said several important infrastructure projects were deferred or rescheduled owing to the economic crisis.

"The government only proceeded with critical projects that can stimulate the country's economic recovery. This include the Port of Tanjung Pelepas," he said.

"This has proved that even though the port was built during lean times, the project can be implemented successfully. In fact, the port's construction was completed three months earlier from the original schedule," he said.

The first phase comprises six wharves with a combined length of 2.16km.

They will be built in stages depending on the international and regional container market growth and demand.

The port can handle 3.8 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) a year when the wharves are fully operational.

The 600-metre widening of the berth area in the 15-metre deep water will enable the port to handle new generation container ships.

It also has 18 super-post panamax cranes with a capacity to lift 40-tonne containers apart from 58 units of rubber-tyred gantry cranes.

Information Technology systems are being used for the port's operations.

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