

13 MAR 2000

Mahathir-Incentives

EFFICIENCY IS KEY TO WOOING MORE USERS, PM TELLS PORTS

JOHOR BAHRU, March 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said local ports must make the most of government incentives to improve efficiency if they are to attract more users.

Greater efficiency was the key to wooing more shippers, exporters and importers to use local ports, he said stressing that patriotism alone was not enough as a pull-factor.

Towards that end, it was really up to the country's port administrators to maximise the incentives the government had already handed out to them, he said.

"It's not patriotism alone. We must be more efficient and cost-effective for them to use.. as this is a business matter. We'll lose out if it (using local ports) is merely out of patriotism ... it has to be based on competition, efficiency and cost-effectiveness," he said.

"If Tanjung Pelepas is cost-effective, then they (importers and exporters) should be using it," he said at a news conference after opening the 2000 Tanjung Pelepas Port conference and exhibition here today.

Dr Mahathir was asked about local importers and exporters still preferring to use foreign ports despite similar service being available domestically.

On Tanjung Pelepas, the prime minister reckoned that the port would take five years to reach a level meriting an "encouraging performance".

On the proposed underground naval base in Sepanggar, Sabah, the prime minister said it would be a key future installation especially for the navy's submarine fleet.

"We'll buy the submarines when we have the money," he added.

-- BERNAMA

MKO RYN