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Manufacturers urged to utilise local ports

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LOCAL manufacturers have no excuse not to fully utilise local ports now that the Port of Tanjung Pelepas is in operation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said they should conduct all export and import transactions through local ports, and no longer be dependent on foreign ports.

Dr Mahathir, who officially opened the PTP - which cost RM2.4 billion (Phase One) - in Gelang Patah, said the port, equipped with some of the world's most sophisticated communication, infrastructure and transport systems, was poised to be a leading transshipment hub in the region.

He pledged the Government's total support and commitment to ensure that local ports succeeded and attained their fullest capacity.

"The Government is willing to look into all port-related problems to enhance the port sector."

Dr Mahathir said the Government realised that ports played an important role in economic progress, and even in developed countries the port sector contributed to a big percentage of national income.

PTP's opening, Dr Mahathir said, marked yet another step in the Government's long-term measure to strengthen the country's port sector, and reflected the overall success in the country's development.

The port in the south-western tip of Johor, which ranks among the country's biggest infrastructure projects, affirms Malaysia's ability to build a port of international standards.

The Prime Minister said there were plans to scale down the project as it was constructed during the economic downturn.

However, the port operator - who was determined to meet the future needs of the shipping industry as well as local exporters and importers - decided to go ahead with the initial plan.

Unlike most emerging ports of late, which begin with two or three berths, PTP, under phase one alone, has six berths. Each berth spans 360 metres in length, thereby offering a total linear wharf of 2.16km. The first two berths are now operational.

This and other state-of-the-art facilities are to immediately cater to PTP's target market of main line operators handling the container trade, and at the same time practice economies of scale and flexibility in its operations.

Confident of PTP's success, Dr Mahathir said the port's main strength was its location at the confluence of the world's busiest international shipping lane, and its natural deep draft.

"PTP will act as a catalyst for further economic growth, particularly for southern Johor," he said, adding that the port was well on its way to becoming a foremost gateway that would boost commerce in the country.

However, he said, a port's infrastructure and equipment alone did not guarantee the attainment of world class standards, rather it should be complemented by competent operations and efficient service.

"Pelabuhan Tanjung Pelepas Sdn Bhd, as the port operator, must ensure that its staff are trained to provide efficient service," he said.

He added that Government employees in port-related agencies must also play a role to give their best in terms of quality.

When the first phase of PTP is completed by mid next year, there will be a total of 18 Super Post Panamax gantry quayside cranes and 58 units of rubber-tyred gantry cranes.

The first six quayside cranes are now operational and each has a lifting capacity of 50 tonnes, with an outreach of 53 metres. These cranes are capable of serving the largest of today's vessels.

Also present at the opening ceremony, held at the Port Administration Building complex, were Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, State Exco members, heads of departments, PTP chairman Datuk Mohd Taufik Abdullah and PTP chief executive officer Mohd Sidik Shaik Osman.

Dr Mahathir then toured the port facilities and opened the PTP 2000 Conference and Exhibition held at a hotel in Johor Baru.

Speaking at a Press conference later, he said it would take time before PTP could be a major transshipment hub. "I think in five years you will see whether we are progressing in that direction."

To a question he said: "I saw it when it was a swamp less than three years ago and today it looks like a very good port to me. People who constructed and operated it have done a very good job. That is something I am very happy and proud of because, in Malaysia, we always try to deliver ahead of time and be of good quality.

"It seems that PTP is ahead of time and has the quality that we want for our port."

Opening the PTP 2000 Conference and Exhibition, Dr Mahathir said the Government was confident that further growth in the port sector would thrust the Malaysian economy into a new era of globalisation.

He also said with shipping lines embarking on Super Post Panamax vessels, the world's demand for containerised cargo was expected to continue to increase with reduced overall freight rates.

"This, we believe, will lead to further port expansion and a surge in demand for both the port and shipping sectors, moving further towards the growth of global logistics business providing effective avenues and choices for cargo owners."

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