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Keng Yaik-Palm Oil

CHARTER SHIPS TO SEND PALM OIL TO PAKISTAN, WEST ASIA, EXPORTERS TOLD

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 20 (Bernama) -- The government will ask local palm oil exporters to charter ships to transport the commodity to Pakistan and West Asia if shipping lines refused to sail to the two regions or if insurance cost charged by them are too expensive.

Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the government would insure the ships if insurance companies charged a high war-risk premium and shipping lines refused to ply the routes.

Freight charges had increased markedly with the imposition of the war-risk premium by shipping lines following the Sept 11 attacks on the United States and the ongoing US-led retaliatory air strikes on Afghanistan.

As a result, ships were reluctant to sail to the regions and this had severely hit Malaysia's palm oil exports by as much as 20 per cent of the country's total exports of 2.3 million tonnes.

Dr Lim said the Cabinet, in its weekly meeting on Wednesday, agreed that exporters should charter ships and the government would insure the vessels if the war-risk premium was too expensive.

"If no one is willing to give insurance or the insurance is too high, the government will insure the ships to make sure our palm oil goes to Pakistan and West Asia," Dr Lim, who is also Gerakan president, told a media conference after chairing the party's monthly Central Committee meeting.

He said he would hold a dialogue with shipping agents and local palm oil exporters on Tuesday to discuss the government's stand and would ask the exporters to charter ships.

On party matters, Dr Lim said Gerakan hoped the government would initiate a national conference on terrorism for all political parties including the opposition and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to discuss terrorism and militancy in the country.

"We should identify the focal point of terrorism and militancy in this country. We will not support any form of militant uprising in this country," he said.

Dr Lim said Gerakan supported Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for an international conference on terrorism to identify and define what terrorism is all about.

"There is a confusion between terrorism and freedom fighters," he said.

Dr Lim said the party also called on the United States and its allies to review their attacks on Afghanistan.

"Although we are against terrorism, the indiscriminate bombings in Afghanistan resulting in the loss of innocent lives should be reviewed by the United States," he said.

On the 2002 Budget, he said, the party would focus on helping the Small-and Medium-Scale Industries (SMIs), smallholders and small-time businessmen to stay afloat under the current global economic climate.

He said Gerakan's economic bureau would concentrate on encouraging SMIs, smallholders and businessmen to expand and diversify their products to international market and also look into their marketing and financial problems.

"We want to boost the smallholders' income. Gerakan will give its feedback to the various ministries on the problems faced by these groups," he added.

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