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## Ports in the 21st century

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ECONOMIC globalisation has brought about tremendous increases in exchange of goods across the world. In pursuit of economical and competitive manufacturing, production centres of most, if not all, industries have rapidly shifted beyond national borders.

Consumers also have started to bring in agricultural and manufactured goods for their daily life from all over the world so long as the price and quality are reasonable. As the impact of globalisation deepens, world trade will continue to expand.

Despite the 1997 Asian currency crisis and the ensuing economic turmoil, total world trade has not declined in volume but has instead undergone a slowdown in growth, with regional trends varying significantly. It is now back on the path to sound growth again.

In 1998, world trade grew 3.7 per cent with seaborne trade reaching over five billion tons. For 1999 and 2000, trade growth has been at about the same rate although this is still significantly lower than the pre-crisis level. As for container traffic, the world throughput of 188 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) is expected to increase to between 417 and 491 million TEUs by 2012, with Asia experiencing the largest growth.

To cope with ever growing world trade, ports will no doubt continue to play a critical and indispensable role. In his keynote address at the International Association of Ports and Harbors' (IAPH) World Ports Conference in Kuala Lumpur in May 1999, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made this point clearly: 'No matter how information technology advances, world trade cannot materialise without ports. This is exactly why every country needs to develop much more advanced and efficient ports for its prosperity.'