

Dr M: Don't take piracy lightly, keep Straits safe

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THE challenges and threats like piracy faced by the maritime industry should not be taken lightly, said former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said piracy in the Straits of Malacca remained a menace and threatened the security and safety of vessels using the Straits.

"While foreign countries consider the Straits of Malacca as an international waterway, they are unwilling to bear the costs of keeping the waters clear of pollution, in particular oil, which affects the shores of our country.

"The Straits may not be man-made but keeping it safe and clear for the ever-increasing traffic cost the riparian States a goodly sum of money," Dr Mahathir said at a dinner where he was inaugurated the honorary Fellow of the Malaysian Maritime Institute (Ikmal) in Putrajaya last week.

Dr Mahathir received the Fellow from the Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah.

"We are now living in an era of intense competition due to the growing globalisation of trade and shipping.

"The maritime industry will continue to witness both horizontal and vertical integration as part of value adding process in response to economic growths.

"We need to respond efficiently and quickly if we are not to lose our position," he said.

Currently, Dr Mahathir said the demand for global maritime transportation presents exciting growth opportunities.

He said the shipping, freight and charter markets had been expanding beyond expectations.

"The new developments that are sweeping across the maritime

industry create a sense of urgency for us to review and analyse our own preparedness to be more competitive in this demanding industry and to recognise the opportunities presented.

"We have more than 50 ports, big and small, and each would be competing with the others to emerge as the most attractive.

"Competition is good in order to improve efficiency but at times

ports should also consider co-operation, so as not to duplicate the services and to make them more comprehensive.

"A division of labour must be considered so that investments in costly facilities are not wasted," he said.

Dr Mahathir said local ports had the capacity to improve and compete with ports in neighbouring countries because they had

the advantage of their own hinterland, adequate land for port supporting industries, manufacturing and processing, and generally their costs were lower.

"But we must develop port management to the highest degree of efficiency using the latest technologies.

"I would not advise every state to have a port as a prestige project.

"But where necessary and feasible port facilities should be built to service and implement the major ports of the country.

"Inland ports can also do this very well. Major ports must also remember that ports are not about handling cargo and containers only.

"Port must provide services like bunkering, stevedoring, insurance, financing and industries involved in breaking bulk, packaging and repackaging."

Dr Mahathir credited the importance of bodies like Ikmal, which had played an important role in promoting the industry as well as playing an advisory role to all parties involved, including relevant government agencies.

He said Ikmal was also involved in advising government agencies in reviving the proposed ferry service between East and West Malaysia.

"Unfortunately attempts to make Langkawi a registration centre for yachts have not yet succeeded after almost three years," he said.

Ikmal president Capt Jaffar Lamri said the Fellowship Award was given to the former premier for his tremendous contribution to the development of the country's maritime industry during his tenure.