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Growth of ports due to PM's vision

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PORT KLANG, Mon. - The rapid development of the country's ports is due to one man who is constantly in a hurry - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

So thinks Westport executive chairman Tan Sri G. Gnanalingam, who said if the development of the ports had been delayed by a couple of years, it would have been a costly error.

He said amid opposition, Dr Mahathir made the right decision to develop the ports in 1995.

"It was perfectly timed as the Asian economic crisis hit the region in 1997, and if the decision had been a little late then we would all have been finished," he said at a journalism course on shipping and ports organised by the Malaysian Press Institute at Westport here today.

Gnanalingam said even he opposed the idea initially, but had now been proven wrong by the Prime Minister's vision.

In a lighter vein, he said if there was anything he could ask Dr Mahathir for, it would be his binoculars.

"He seems to be able to see the distant future with it ...it will be very useful for me," he said to the laughter of the participants.

He said Port Klang, which comprises Northport, South Point and Westport, was ranked 57th in the world in 1980, 35th in 1990, 26th in 1995 and among the top 10 in 2000.

He said many were doubtful of the ports' ability to grow whenever the world was hit with wars or economic crises, but they have all been proven wrong.

In 1999, at the height of the economic crisis, Westport recorded a 75 per cent growth from the year before.

He said a factor which led to the ports' growth was the increased demand of almost everything from consumers.

"As the population grows, their demands and taste grow too and this leads to obsolescence."

For example, he said people now wanted not just one television at home but even up to three and these too should come with the latest features.

"This leads to products becoming obsolete faster than they used to. So manufacturing increases, leading to more transportation of goods and more volume in shipping".

On whether the war in Iraq would affect the ports' volume, he said the effect would be minimal if the duration was short.

"Most of the countries have already stocked up on their essentials but if the war lasts very long, then there will be some effect."

Earlier, in his welcoming address at the two-day course for journalists, MPI chairman Datuk Ahmad A Talib said journalists should equip themselves with knowledge to "move the nation".

He said journalists could only carry out their tasks authoritatively and accurately if they were knowledgeable.

Ahmad, who is News Straits Times Sdn Bhd group editor, said the topics covered at the course would enhance the skills, knowledge and raise their ability to carry out their journalistic tasks.

"You may all be experts in your own field but you cannot isolate (yourself from) the development that's taking place around you ...shipping is part of it," he added.

Maritime Institute of Malaysia director-general Datuk Cheah Kong Wai

spoke on the key players in the logistics chain, Port Klang Authority (LPK) general manager Datin Paduka O.C. Phang on the role of LPK and Westport senior marketing manager S. Manimala on the various laws and standards.

Tomorrow, the participants will be taken on a tour of the port before a dialogue session with Gnanalingam.

MPI was registered in 1974, taking over the role as training centre from the South East Asia Press Centre. Since then, it has regularly conducted various courses for journalists and the Malaysian mass media.

Since 1974, MPI has conducted 252 courses, benefiting about 5,400 journalists in courses like Bahasa Melayu, English, science and technology, photojournalism and business reporting.