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Malaysia 'must strengthen maritime industry'

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JOHOR BARU: Malaysia needs to strengthen its maritime industry given its status as a trading nation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

Towards this end, the country needs to have a more indigenous merchant fleet that is owned and operated by its nationals as well as efficient ports, shipbuilding and repair facilities.

These facilities must then be complemented with a sound transportation network to ensure that goods were efficiently distributed between ports and inland

supply centres, Abdullah said.

"An important part of our country's economic planning is to emphasise the application of high technology and value-added services.

"In particular, we are aiming towards greater application of technology and value creation in strategic industries, including marine transportation and logistics," Abdullah said.

The prime minister said this in his speech at a ceremony to name MISC Berhad's latest liquefied natural gas tanker at the Malaysia

Marine and Heavy Engineering Sdn Bhd's (MMHE) shipyard in Pasir Gudang here yesterday.

The 145,000 cubic-metre vessel *Seri Ayu* is the 25th in MISC's fleet of LNG tankers. MMHE is a unit of Petronas subsidiary MISC Berhad, an international shipping and logistics company.

At yesterday's function, Abdullah praised Petronas, MISC and MMHE for their efforts towards increasing the nation's competitive advantage in the maritime industry.

"Today, history has come full

circle. Thirty-four years ago, the late Tun Razak Hussein (and second prime minister) set in motion the founding of this shipyard facility in Pasir Gudang.

"Thanks to the efforts of Petronas, MISC and MMHE, this facility in Pasir Gudang remains at the forefront of the developments in Malaysia's modern shipbuilding and marine repair industry.

"MISC and MMHE have done much towards developing home-grown talent and expertise in the fields of engineering, science and technology."