

New rules plan to regulate strait

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The conference on the Straits of Malacca will discuss drawing up new rules to regulate the "lawless" strait between Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Describing the existing regulations governing the use of the strait as outdated, the Prime Minister said the littoral States should meet for a possible revamp of the regulations.

He said the conference was necessary to safeguard the interests of Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand in view of the heavy traffic in the waterway.

"I think it is time that we sat down and talked. This should not only be confined

to the Straits of Malacca since there is almost a state of lawlessness in terms of the passage of ships through other narrow straits.

"The world must contribute towards the maintenance of the waterway. We are told that we have no right to collect toll simply because it is an international waterway.

"This however, was declared in the days when the maritime powers were elsewhere and there were only small ships and no huge oil tankers or hazardous cargo.

"Now the situation has changed and the world cannot just claim that it is theirs and not be prepared to pay for its maintenance.

"Some form of payment must be made to some au-

thority which would be responsible for keeping the strait open and reduce any danger to shipping," he said in response to questions from reporters after opening the First Asean Congress organised by Asean Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had to foot a huge bill to clean up the oil spill from the tanker *Nagasaki Spirit* which collided with another ship in the strait although it was no fault of Malaysia.

Stressing the need to make the busy waterway safer after a spate of accidents, he said there was also the threat of piracy in the strait.

"When pirates board these big ships and tie up the crew the ships are left to

sail on their own for miles. What happens when the direction is wrong and it lands on our shores.

"This can very well happen. You cannot stop a ship immediately like a car. It takes three or four miles before it can stop. We are too close and we are very concerned," he said.

He said Malaysia was worried about the Japanese vessel *Akatsuki Maru* carrying plutonium from Europe which may sail through the strait because if an accident occurred, enormous dangers may be posed.

When asked whether he will raise the issue with the Japanese Prime Minister during his forthcoming visit to Japan, Dr Mahathir said he had no plans to meet Mr Keiichi Mivazawa.

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