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MALAYSIA URGES MELAKA STRAITS USERS TO PAY FOR ITS UPKEEP

Mahathir-straits

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KUCHING, Aug 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today reiterated its call to countries or shipping companies frequently using the Straits of Melaka to contribute towards its maintenance.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it would be unfair to expect Malaysia to maintain the strait,; without financial assistance from these countries or shipping companies.

+If anything happens.we will be the victim,+ he told reporters after performing the ground-breaking ceremony for the Sheraton Santubong Resort at the Seaside Damai Golf Club in Santubong, about 40km from here.

It was only fair that those plying the straits pay for its upkeep, he said when commenting on the collision between the Greek cruise liner, MV Royal Pacific, and the Taiwanese trawler, +F.V. Te Fu+, in the straits about 15 nautical miles south of Tanjung Sepat, near Port Dickson, yesterday.

The cruise ship, carrying 534 people including 191 crew members, sank 15 minutes after being rammed by the trawler. -- more

▼24/08/20-46MST

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The Prime Minister said there was a real possibility of collision involving oil tankers happening there.

Dr Mahathir said it was on this premise that Malay-sin had suggested that a levy be imposed on ships or countries frequently using the sealane.

However, Malaysia, faced problem because the straits was regarded as an international waterway which did not provide for shipping there to be regulated.

This principle of international waterway was not appropriate in the present-day context because it was made during the oldendays when there was no possibility of mishaps like oil tankers breaking as there were no such vessels then.

+But now we need to monitor international waterways, just like we need to look after the Suez and Panama Canals or they will be damaged,+ he said. -- more

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He said in certain instances Malaysia had to maintain the straits, like deepening the waterway.

+Do countries using the straits expect Malaysia to spend big sums of money to maintain the waterway for them to use it free?+ he said.

Dr Mahathir said these countries should be held responsible if accidents there resulted in damage to Malaysia's coasts or-created problems for its fishermen. -- Bernama :

▼24/08/20-55MST