

PM: Users should pay to upkeep the strait

KUCHING, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has reiterated his call to maritime nations and shipowners whose ships are plying the Straits of Malacca that they pay for its maintenance.

He said Malaysia faced great difficulty in this aspect as the Straits of Malacca was an international waterway, where it did not have the power to regulate the ships using it.

Dr Mahathir, who was asked to comment on yesterday's collision between a cruise liner and a Taiwanese trawler in the Straits of Malacca, said the possibility of similar accidents recurring was great in view of the large number of ships using the strait.

"This time it involved a passenger boat but next time it can be a tanker which may cause massive pollution in the strait," he said after a ground-breaking ceremony of the Sheraton-Santubong Resort at the Seaside Damai Golf Club near here today.

Dr Mahathir said the Straits of Malacca should be maintained like that of the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal which are properly maintained all the time.

"If it is shallow and needs dredging, efforts should be made to deepen it," he said.

He added he had voiced his opinion to maritime nations but they had given the excuse that it was an international waterway and they should not pay for its up-

keep.

He said the principle of international waterway was made a long time ago when there was no possibility of such incidents and, therefore, those using it were not charged.

He said it would be unfair for Malaysia to spend a lot of money on the maintenance of the Straits of Malacca while others used it for free.

He added in the event of an accident resulting in the destruction of the coastal areas, and in prohrms to fishermen, they (the users) could not be held responsible.

"We can be the implementer of the maintenance programme but they should pay for it."