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Mahathir-straits

SHIPS MUST PAY TO USE MELAKA STRAITS, SAYS MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today a system of payment has to be introduced for ships using the Straits of Melaka.

There was an increase in the number and deadweight tonnage of vessels using the waterway, and which transported oil and waste, he told reporters at the Chinese New Year "open house" of Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding here.

He said it had been declared a long time ago that the Straits of Melaka was an international waterway good for only that time, whereby ships of 200 to 300 tonnes used it and then their number was small and they did not carry oil or waste.

"Now, the size of the vessels have grown to half a million tonnes and they carry oil and waste which can cause serious pollution, and we can no longer regard the Straits of Melaka as an international waterway," he said.

Any accident or fire in the straits would have detrimental effect on the littoral states, he said when asked to comment on the collision of a supertanker "Maersk Navigaor" and a tanker "Sanko Honour" in the Andaman Sea near Pulau Rondo, about 50 nautical miles north of Banda Aceh in Sumatra early Thursday. Both ships caught fire after the accident. -- more

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"A system of maintenance by countries whose vessels used the straits or a levy has to be introduced because each time there is an accident in the straits, the government has to shoulder the burden," he said.

He also called for a review of the system whereby a ship was registered under one company and also in a third country because this was a way the company or country avoided having to pay for damage in an accident.

"We are not happy with this, and will raise the matter at the meeting among the littoral states in Indonesia in June," he said, adding that the time had come for a study of the need to register a vessel in one's own country.

Dr Mahathir also said it was necessary for a traffic separation scheme to be implemented in the straits, and the countries whose vessels used the waterway should pay for the maintenance of all equipment.

"Each time there is an accident in the Straits of Melaka, the government has to shoulder the burden... the fishermen are unable to fish, the shores are polluted, and the country's tourism industry is adversely affected. But those who use the straits do not pay anything," he said.

"They must take responsibility," he added.

He also said that he had discussed the matter with Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa when he visited Malaysia recently. -- more

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Meanwhile, Law said it was necessary to set up a coordinating body among the littoral states to overcome oil pollution in the straits.

On the "Maersk Navigator," he said latest reports showed that the supertanker was drifting northwest, far from Malaysian waters.

Nevertheless, the Department of Environment had been directed to monitor the vessel because it was burning and extent of any oil spill had yet to be ascertained, he added. -- Bernama

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