

# Dr M calls for pollution control in Malacca Straits

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — All countries using the Malacca Straits should help the littoral States to control pollution in the waterway, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said international assistance and co-operation was urgently required to do this. Malaysia, he said, had spent a lot of money to keep the straits clean and safe.

"This is what we are concerned about. The Malacca Straits is considered an international waterway and if we pollute the Straits then the victims will be the littoral States of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

"That is why we want the international community to be with us in this effort. Legislations may have to be tightened as well. Even though the straits is regarded as international waters, we have the right to take action against anyone who pollutes it."

He said many ships use the Straits without paying any toll unlike the Suez and Panama canals. The littoral States would be the ones to lose if vessels continue to pollute the straits, he said.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked about the detention of 12 foreign tankers,

three of which were held on suspicion of desludging, off Johor last Thursday and the subsequent escape of all but one of them.

He was speaking to reporters at a Chinese New Year reception hosted by Minister of Science, Technology and Environment Datuk Law Hieng Deng at his residence in Jalan Damansara Endah, Damansara Heights for the Cabinet.

The Prime Minister and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, arrived in a Proton Satria.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Minister of Information Datuk Mohamad Rahmat and Minister of National Unity and Social Development Datuk Napsiah Omar were also present at the open house.

When asked about the subsequent escape of the vessels and if he felt that enforcement was ineffective, Dr Mahathir said it was possible that the coordination among the various enforcement agencies were not strong.

"This is a situation where we are still not experienced. But we will step up our control and supervision of the waterways. However, all these require heavy expenditure in terms of ships, radar and many other things," he said, adding that if Malaysia has enough evidence that the tankers had polluted its waters, then it could seek Singapore's assistance

to detain them.

Law, speaking to reporters later, said Malaysia was taking the matter very seriously in view of the many ships passing through the Straits.

He said the pollution level in the Straits was currently 200ppm (parts per million). Unless urgent and drastic action was taken the level could increase to 500ppm and destroy all marine and aquatic life in the Straits.

Law said: "The littoral States have nothing to gain but everything to lose and we hope all three countries take this matter very seriously."

"If we don't check the problem of pollution of the Straits then the situation will get worse and the coral reefs and marine life in the waterway will be totally destroyed."

Law also said that Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia which currently held annual bilateral meetings to discuss issues such as pollution and environment were considering holding trilateral talks to adopt a common stand on the problem and that Indonesia would probably host the next meeting of the three countries in about a month's time.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Ministry was prepared to assist the Department of Environment in locating the two Singapore-registered vessels which escaped without paying bond amounting to RM278,000.

Najib said the DOE should get in touch with the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) and the Royal Malaysian Navy to enable further action to be taken on the two ships — the *MT Song San* and the *MV Solo*.

"The action taken on the two ships would also depend on the assets we have in the area."

In Muar, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin chided locals who sought to get rich quick by collaborating with the foreign-registered vessels and bringing in small bags of sludge at night by boats and dumping them along the coastal fringes and beaches.

"We have taken action on these people whose selfish and irresponsible act has caused damage to our coastal areas and streams and is destroying the only source of livelihood for thousands of fishermen."

Muhyiddin called on the relevant departments to intensify their patrols to curb illegal entry of vessels, adding that more sophisticated and fast boats, were needed in line with the increasing number of ships using the international waterway.

"The Malaysia-Singapore joint committee has called on the Indonesian Government to study the common problem and to devise measures to curb pollution in the Straits of Malacca.

"We cannot allow this to happen without appropriate checks. The culprits must be brought to justice."