

Dr M: We will intensify air surveillance, set up

# Nabbing sludge

By Saiful  
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JITRA, Wed. — The Government is planning to intensify air surveillance and set up a laboratory to analyse sludge in its efforts to apprehend those responsible for dumping such waste in Malaysian waters, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the Government was very concerned about the rampant discharging of oil sludge by ships in Malaysian waters.

In view of the pressing situation, he said, it was studying a proposal to set up a laboratory which could determine the source of the sludge.

The laboratory would analyse the sample of oil sludge from the sea and the results would enable the authorities to establish the source of the waste, he said.

Once the suspected errant vessel is detained, the authorities would be able to match the sample analysed with the sludge obtained from the ship.

This would enable the authorities to take action against the culprits, he told reporters at his Hari Raya Aidil Adha open house at Dewan Jitra here.

Three sludge dumping incidents were reported in the South China Sea over the past one week, resulting in several islands and beaches in Pahang, Terengganu and Johor being polluted.

In the first case, a cargo ship, *Roshni*, was spotted last Wednesday desludging off Pulau Tioman, Pahang. The second and third desludging incidents involved tankers, *Petro Concord* and *Pacific Wave*, on Sunday and Monday respectively near Kemaman, Terengganu.

In February, three ships were found desludging at Tanjung Piai in Johor and in April, a tugboat was found committing a similar offence at the same location.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was very

concerned about the situation as there were many ships plying the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea.

"And there are ships dumping oil sludge behind our backs."

He said air surveillance of the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea needed to be stepped up to curb such activities.

"At present, we are unable to provide adequate air surveillance because we have only four aircraft to patrol the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca."

Asked whether he was satisfied with the co-operation of the neighbouring countries in fighting the problem, Dr Mahathir said they had been co-operating well.

He cited as an example the co-operation given by a neighbouring country which led to the detention of a ship in Johor a few months ago.

Asked about the increase in the prices of houses, Dr Mahathir said it could have been caused by the rising cost of land and building materials.

He said the Government would investigate to determine if the prices of building materials had gone up.

He said it was time the Government paid more attention to the construction of medium-cost houses.

"All the while we have been giving too much attention to low-cost houses. It is time we took a look at the development of medium-cost houses, especially those priced below RM300,000."

Dr Mahathir said the Government would ensure the prices of medium-cost houses were affordable.

He said the Government was also looking into the problem of low-cost houses being snapped up by the higher income groups.

"We have observed the situation and discovered that there are well off people buying low-cost

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laboratory to analyse waste

# dumpers

## Insufficient info to identify culprits

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houses," he said.  
"We know they are not eligible to buy them as they are able to spend huge sums of money on renovations and in some cases, they own two cars."

Asked whether the Government would tighten the low-cost housing guidelines, Dr Mahathir said they were already in place, but insufficient information hampered the authorities' efforts to identify the culprits.