

Proposed transport network to reduce congestion in Straits of Malacca

Penang-Songkhla link-up

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JITRA, Sun. — In a move to reduce traffic congestion and pollution in the Straits of Malacca, Malaysia is initiating the establishment of a massive transportation network between Penang and Songkhla in Thailand, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the project had been proposed on a joint-venture basis among private companies from Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia.

He said it was initiated as a solution to reduce traffic volume, ship collisions and pollution in the Straits of Malacca.

He said Malaysia had experienced high costs in mopping up pollution in the waterway as a result of the irresponsible dumping of sludge by passing vessels.

Dr Mahathir said under the proposal, the Penang Port would be established as the disembarkation point for cargo. He said the goods

Halban here, was commenting on the frequent ship collisions resulting in oil spills, and dumping of sludge by unscrupulous ships plying the Straits of Malacca.

Dr Mahathir said the rising number of accidents in the straits was due to the increasing number of vessels using the waterway.

Asked whether the Government would intensify enforcement along the waterway, the Prime Minister said that it had been carried out and the Government required large funds to do so.

However, Dr Mahathir was not happy with the refusal of the maritime countries to contribute funds to assist Malaysia to manage the Straits.

"The vessels plying the Straits of Malacca are servicing other maritime nations and therefore the Government is of the opinion that these nations should assist us to manage the Straits.

"We have asked for their assistance but they refuse to contribute claiming that we have no right to ask since it is an international waterway.

could be transported by road to Songkhla while pipelines would be laid to transfer liquefied materials between the two points.

"We will try to persuade shippers to unload their consignments at Penang Port and utilise the transportation facilities," he said.

Dr Mahathir said by doing so, the traffic volume in the Straits of Malacca could be reduced, besides helping to bring down the number of vessel collisions and dumping of pollutants.

He said talks had been going on among the three countries to discuss the proposed collaboration.

"Thailand and Indonesia have responded positively and two Japanese have undertaken a study on the proposal.

"We are waiting for the results of the studies and we don't mind having the Japanese as our partner in this venture because most of the ships are bound for Japan," he added.

The Prime Minister, who was speaking to reporters at a thanksgiving lunch in conjunction with the recent Barisan Nasional election victory at Kampung Pantai

"This is unfair. People have to pay for using the Suez Canal," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the maritime nations should contribute funds to Malaysia to purchase pollution fighting equipment.

He said Malaysia was not only burdened with cleaning up the pollution in the Straits but the country's fishing and tourism industries were also affected by the indiscriminate dumping of sludge by irresponsible vessels.

"And we have to spend a lot of money. This is something which is very unfair," he said.

Dr Mahathir said when the Straits of Malacca were delineated as an international waterway 400 years ago, only small vessels were using them.

"And these 300-tonne vessels did not carry oil and effluents and they did not dump sludge into the sea.

"But today, huge vessels up to 500,000 tonnes use the straits and are endangering us," he added.

Asked what action would

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Dr M: We are being exploited by others

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be taken against the errant shippers, Dr Mahathir said: "Our country is weak... We cannot enforce anything and they are exploiting us.

"Other countries in our position would have exhausted all avenues to ensure action is taken against the polluters.

"This is a world which has been talking about justice but they have never upheld justice," he added.

Three sludge-dumping incidents were reported in the South China Sea more than three weeks ago, resulting in several islands and beaches in Pahang, Terengganu and Johor being polluted.

In the first case, the cargo ship *Roshni* was spotted desludging off Pulau Tioman, Pahang. The second and third desludging incidents involved tankers — the *Petro Concord* and the *Pacific Wave* — 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.

Two days ago, the collision between the empty chemical tanker *Eastern Bliss* and the Indian-owned bulk carrier *Samrat Ashok* in the Straits of Malacca resulted in one crew member being killed and 17 others injured.

On May 2 last year, a passenger boat collided with a ferry three kilometres off Umbai beach in Malacca, resulting in three dead, including two children.

On Sept 19, 1992, a collision between the container ship *Ocean Blessing* and the oil tanker *Nagasaki Spirit* in the Straits of Malacca resulted in 44 people killed. Only 28 bodies were recovered.
