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British nuke waste ship banned from using our waterways

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysia has banned British freighter Pacific Teal, which is carrying processed nuclear waste, from using its waterways and the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said the decision to ban the ship was made at today's Cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet has also directed the Foreign Ministry to convey to the Japanese Government Malaysia's stand on the matter and to seek an assurance that the ship would not use our waterways.

Law said the decision was made because the Government was concerned about a possible mishap involving the ship in our waterways.

"Our waterways are very narrow and congested. Some 150 ships ply the Straits of Malacca daily.

"The Cabinet is very concerned over this matter. We want to ensure the health and safety of the people," he told reporters after the Cabinet meeting.

Law said the Pacific Teal which left the French port of Cherbourg recently was heading for Japan and might be using the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa before entering the Indian Ocean.

This route could take the freighter into the Straits of Malacca.

Law said Malaysia, as a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and through the Atomic Energy Licensing Act, has the legal right to control the movement of any nuclear material within its national jurisdiction.

Asked if the Basel Convention could be applied, he said it was not possible because the Convention only concerned toxic and hazardous waste and not nuclear.

Asked whether the Government would seek assistance from the International Atomic Energy Agency of the United Nations, Law said it would be considered if the need arose.

The waste originated from Japan and was processed for re-use at La Hague under a deal between French state company Cogema and 10 Japanese power companies.

The shipment of the nuclear waste has also caused consternation among environmentalists especially from Greenpeace.

Law also said that he had directed all agencies and departments in his ministry to submit a strategic plan on ways to help boost the country's economic development.

The directive was in response to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent call for all ministries to help with the country's economic development this year.

Law said the departments and agencies were asked to submit their plans for the period covering 1997-2000, within a month from today.

The plan must include the agencies' weaknesses and strengths, their visions and missions, objectives, directions and strategies.

The agencies must also include how they could implement the strategies effectively and efficiently.

Law said Malaysia has been chosen to host the world's biggest software conference in July.

The Software Development Asia '97 will be organised by Miler Reeman Group from July 29 to 31.

This is the first time the conference is to be held outside the United

States and Canada.

Law said some 300 participants from East Asia and 2,500 visitors were expected to attend the conference.

He also announced that Tenaga Nasional Berhad executive chairman Datuk Dr Ahmad Tajuddin Ali has been appointed the new chairman of the Design Council of Malaysia to replace the late Tan Sri Zain Azraai Zainal Abidin.

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