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Malacca Straits to get radar next week

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The RM100 million radar system to monitor ships in the Straits of Malacca will be commissioned by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad next week.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the radar, to be commissioned on March 27, would improve traffic safety in the Straits. This would also enable the Malaysian authorities to monitor vessels plying what shippers say is the world's busiest waterway.

"The radar detects the movement of each vessel and provides early warning if ships are heading on a collision course," he told reporters after opening a forum on "Proposed Legislation of Recreational Vessels in Malaysia" organised by the Association of Marine Industries of Malaysia.

Dr Ling said mandatory reporting by ships could not be implemented yet in the Malacca Straits although the International Maritime Organisation had approved it in principle.

The radar system would be manned by the Marine Department at Port Klang and Kukup in Johor. It requires all ships passing through the Straits to report to the nearest control centre.

Dr Ling said the IMO would hold a conference in May and mandatory reporting by ships, as observed in several advanced countries would be enforced in the straits six months after that.

An estimated 30,000 ships, mostly cargo and container carriers, use the straits each year.

On transportation for the Commonwealth Games in September, he said the organiser Sukom Ninety-Eight expected a volume of more than 90,000 people during the opening and the closing.

The organiser would be printing pamphlets on the transport logistics for the 17 sports venues.

A comprehensive plan on public transport for spectators has been worked out.

Dr Ling also said The country's long coastline and its many attractive islands and scenic spots offered tremendous potential for marine tourism.

"Thus, there is no need to go to Mauritius or the Great Barrier Reef. I would also suggest that those with recreational boats assist in promoting marine tourism."

Dr Ling spoke of vast business opportunities, and said it could be a major revenue earner.

He also suggested greater emphasis on promoting the cruise industry in Asean.

Malaysia has cruise terminals at Westport and in Langkawi.

On the proposed Malaysian Shipping Act, Dr Ling said this would ensure such vessels were registered under the "recreational vessel register".

He said a "certificate of registry" would be issued to the vessel owner. This would identify the boat, to facilitate its entry into any foreign port. There are about 2,000 in the country.

"As we are still drafting the Act which encompasses three existing legislations - Merchant Shipping Ordinance 1952, Sabah Merchant Shipping Ordinance 1960 and Sarawak Merchant Shipping Ordinance, the ministry welcomes feedback from AMIM on this matter," he added.

AMIM president Datuk Amin Shah Omar Shah said the forum was to address issues arising from the proposed legislation which would affect the marine leisure industry.

His speech was delivered by AMIM vice-president Chuah Chuan Yong.
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