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Dr M unveils RM100m sea surveillance system

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RECOGNISING the importance of the Straits of Malacca as an international seaway the Government has developed an efficient sea surveillance and traffic management systems in Port Klang.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad unveiled the RM100 million integrated sea surveillance system, the first of its kind in the world in Port Klang yesterday.

"As a maritime nation, Malaysia should have an efficient sea surveillance system and shipping traffic management mechanism.

"This would reduce the risk of accidents and enable the port to respond quickly to any incidents that may disrupt the country's economic interests," he said at the ceremony yesterday.

Given the rising challenges in trade, Dr Mahathir said, it was important to acquire an effective sea surveillance system to check accidents and pollution and to increase productivity.

"The increase in the number of big ships like the post-Panamax and fourth and fifth generation container ships that can use only one-third of the width of the Straits of Malacca has made traffic flow more difficult.

"As there were now more vessels carrying dangerous cargoes, the passive traffic management of before is no longer suitable," he said.

He said it is estimated that more than 600 ships, including transport vessels weighing more than 200,000 deadweight tonnes and cruise ships use the Straits of Malacca daily.

He said in tandem with rapid economic growth in the region traffic along the Straits of Malacca will increase at a rate of 1.3 per cent a year.

"It is expected that by 2010, a total 46,842 ships of more than 30 metre-long will use the Straits each year," he said.

Dr Mahathir said an increase in various water-based activities and inclement weather were among the factors causing collisions and pollution of the waterway.

"Several major collisions have occurred in the Straits of Malacca causing not only pollution but also destruction of property and loss of lives. These mishaps have also cost the Government millions of ringgit to clean up the mess left behind," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government realised the need to establish an efficient and effective sea surveillance system in 1980 when its territorial waters was widened following the declaration of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

This is also related to Malaysia's geographical position which is divided by the sea and the strategic location of the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea which makes it a major shipping lane.

The Government allocated RM100 million to develop a modern sea surveillance system in 1994.

"With such a big allocation it goes to show that we are committed and concerned over the safety of shipping in this region, in particular, the international shipping community in general," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysia's sea surveillance system was among the first in the world based on the concept of coastal radar surveillance developed in the Straits of Malacca which is among the world's busiest waterways after the Straits of Dover and Gibraltar.

This system, developed in 1994 and completed last March, is based on a radar network built along the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia stretching

from Tanjung Kemarung, Langkawi, in the north to Bukit Pengerang, Johor, in the south.

It is designed to locate and monitor ships on a real-time basis and is capable of providing communications with a coastal authority for navigation guide in all situations.

He said the installation of this surveillance system was in line with the requirements of the Law of the Sea Conference 1982 and resolutions of the International Maritime Organisation to safeguard and enhance safety standards as well as to reduce the risk of pollution.

He believed that its safety features, which meet international standards, would help spur economic growth of countries in this region, especially the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle in the north of the Straits of Malacca and the Singapore-Johor-Riau triangle in the south.

He also said the Government is confident that the surveillance system would attract shipping companies to use local ports in line with the Government's policy of encouraging use of local ports.

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