

Coast guards to fight sea threats

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JOHOR BARU: Malaysia's own coast guard, in order to ward off threats and intrusion by foreigners into national waters, will take over from the marine police, navy, Rela and other enforcement bodies when the Cabinet approves the setting up of such a unit.

The proposed Malaysian Police Coast Guard unit would be an extension of the marine police and would involve restructuring of staff and logistics of the force nationwide.

Marine police commander Senior Asst Comm (II) Muhamad Muda said with the formation of the coast guard unit, there would be more effective measures to prevent external threats such as the encroachment of foreign fishermen as well as piracy.

Besides these "traditional threats," the coast guards would also help to prevent "new threats" such as maritime terrorism and bio-piracy, he told reporters after closing a three-month Basic Marine Course at the Marine Police Training Base (Southern Region) here yesterday.

He said Malaysia has about 5,000km of coastline, including Sabah and Sarawak, and 1,007 islands.

There was, therefore, a need to come out with an effective way to patrol these areas, he added.

This would also ensure that the islands were safe for tourists, he said.

SAC Muhamad said the setting up of the unit was decided at a Cabinet meeting in February in the wake of an influx of illegal immigrants entering the country by sea as well as many reported cases of piracy and encroachment.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had mooted the idea of having a separate unit for surveillance and enforcement pertaining to these issues, which all this while had been handled by various agencies.

SAC Muhamad said three of the five key bases nationwide need to be upgraded and relocated to other places and fitted with modern premises and facilities. They are Tampoi, Penang and Kuching.

Citing an example, he said the marine police base in Tampoi would be shifted to Tanjung Pelepas in Gelang Patah as the existing location was not viable for ships to enter due to shallow waters.

"The river ways leading to the base are plagued by silting for some time and the base needs to be upgraded. We have identified a 64ha site to relocate the base.

"It costs us between RM60mil and RM70mil to relocate the base and this includes the building of a jetty, office premises and quarters for the marine police," he added.