

**Share our burden, Malacca Strait users told
Malaysiakini.com
March 13, 2007**

The government today urged the international community to share the costs of protecting a vital sea lane against piracy and called for a blueprint for cooperation.

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said here that international users had failed to match their increasing use of the the Malacca Strait with contributions to the costs needed to ensure its navigational safety.

"Malaysia finds it difficult to accept that while the international users consider the strait as an international sea lane which they have the right to use, however, the efforts of maintaining and securing the waterway have always been regarded (as) the responsibility of the littoral states (the countries bordering the sea lane - Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia)," he said.

"The high expectations from the international users and the increase in volume of traffic have indeed imposed considerable demand and financial burden on the littoral states," he added.

More than 30 percent of world trade and half of the world's oil shipments, an estimated 11 million barrels per day, pass through the strait.

Seventy percent of Japanese and 80 percent of Chinese oil imports from the Middle East pass through the sea lane.

The volume of traffic has increased dramatically, with more than 62,600 ships using the strait in 2005, up 42 percent from 44,000 ships in 1999, he said.

The volume is expected to increase to an estimated 100,000 ships within the next decade, he said, in light of the increase in global trade and the rise of East Asian economies.

Huge expenses

Najib said the littoral states felt "aggrieved by the huge expenses" they had to bear.

"Further, the international users' lukewarm response in terms of resources needed to upkeep the safety of navigation is indeed worrying," he said.

There is a need for the littoral states and the stakeholders to go beyond the confidence-building stage to concrete collaboration, he added.

"Focus thus should be given to further strengthening (anti-piracy) capacity building, training and exploring modalities for burden sharing," Najib said.

Pirate attacks in the strait, which was once one of the world's top piracy blackspots, have fallen in recent years after Indonesia stepped up patrols.

The 960-kilometre waterway has been notoriously vulnerable to pirate attacks, and there have been fears that it could be a tempting target for terrorists.

But Najib stressed that there is "no evidence" of a possible link-up between pirates and terrorists.

"But nonetheless we cannot be overconfident. We must increase our surveillance to ensure such a thing will not take place at all," he added.

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