

**No evidence of extremist threat to Malacca Strait**  
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There is no evidence of an extremist threat to the strategic Malacca Strait through which half of the world's oil shipments pass, said Malaysian officials.

"So far we don't think the threat is really real at this point of time," Transport Minister Chan Kong Choy told reporters.

Chan was among government officials and experts attending a two-day gathering in Kuala Lumpur aimed at enhancing safety in the vital waterway.

Pirate attacks in the 960-kilometre long sea lane have been reduced in recent years after Indonesia stepped up patrols.

Security agencies have warned, however, that the waterway which connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea was under threat from extremists.

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in 2005 the threat of a terrorist attack in the Strait was "real and urgent".

But Chan said the fact insurers have dropped the Strait's war-risk rating reflected the calmer situation in the waterway.

The London-based Joint War Committee of underwriters decided in June 2005 to add the Strait to a list of 20 areas worldwide - alongside Iraq and Lebanon - that it deemed security threats to shipping.

The war-risk tag was removed in August last year.

**No room for complacency**

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak supported Chan's comments saying "no evidence" existed 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," said Najib Razak during a visit to South Korea on Tuesday.

At the gathering in Kuala Lumpur, Hasjim Djalal, from the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, an independent think-tank in Indonesia, told AFP the threat of extremist attack was not a concern for Jakarta.

"The possibility is always there. Even an attack on my bedroom. But in terms of probability, it is not a major concern for us. It is a concern for Singapore and the United States," he said.

Chan also said the littoral states of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore must remain vigilant despite the decline in reported incidents of pirate attacks.

"Of course there is no room for complacency," he said.

### **Sharing the burden**

Regional defence officials said last year that as well as stepped up Indonesian patrols, close military cooperation between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia had dealt the pirates a major blow.

Sixty-five thousand ships, with about one third of the world's freight, pass annually through what was once one of the most pirate-infested waters.

In a speech earlier Tuesday, Chan welcomed a proposal from Japan's Nippon Foundation that users of the Malacca Strait and adjacent Singapore Strait contribute to financing their safety.

Yohei Sasakawa, chairman of the Nippon Foundation, a Japan-based maritime industry lobby group, said traffic volume in the Straits could surge by sixty percent by 2020, from the current four billion deadweight tons (DWT) to 6.4 billion deadweight tons.

"Various safety measures need to be implemented to cope with the greater safety risk due to the rise in traffic," he said adding the measures would cost 300 million dollars over 10 years.

Sasakawa said the burden could be shared between the relevant parties.

During his visit to Seoul, Najib, who is also the defence minister, urged the international community to share the costs of protecting the sea lane and called for a blueprint for cooperation.

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