

Government warms to joint patrols in Malacca Strait
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Malaysia today said it is ready to study ways to boost security in the piracy-prone Malacca Strait, including conducting sensitive joint maritime patrols with Indonesia and Singapore.

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak said there were "regional sensitivities" to overcome - since joint patrols could allow warships from one country to enter another's territorial waters - but flagged Malaysia could warm to the plan.

"We can examine them. Hopefully we can make it (the strait) more secure in the future," Najib told reporters on the sidelines of a five-day maritime security conference organised by the US Pacific Command.

"Of course we have to overcome some of the sensitivities," Najib added, without elaborating.

Maintaining and securing the waterway has always been regarded as the responsibility of the littoral states who border the sea lane - Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The three Southeast Asian countries have implemented several security measures, including coordinated air and sea patrols, to secure the Malacca Strait, regarded as one of the world's most important waterways.

Najib said the challenge for the maritime forces now was to look at some of the procedures and issues related to questions of jurisdiction in the strait to keep it secure.

"Perhaps there is a need to think outside the box and identify ways and means to forge greater cooperation, thus reducing the opportunities for undesirable elements to continue to exploit the loopholes," he said in a speech to the conference.

More than 30 percent of world trade passes through the strait, and Najib had said that the volume of traffic had increased dramatically, with more than 62,600 ships using the strait in 2005, up 42 percent from 44,000 ships in 1999.

Half of the world's oil shipments travel through the waterway, including 70 percent of Japan's and 80 percent of China's oil imports from the Middle East

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