

MT Joaquim Hijack Is First Incident In Malaysia's Maritime Areas

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 10 (Bernama) -- The hijacking of Singapore-registered oil tanker MT Joaquim which went missing in Selangor waters last night, is the first reported incident in Malaysia's maritime areas in the Melaka Strait this year.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman said this was based on information received from the relevant Malaysian authorities.

"Active patrol and surveillance of Malaysia's maritime areas, including in the Melaka Strait have been undertaken by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) and other Malaysian agencies like the Royal Malaysian Navy," he said in a statement here today.

The tanker laden with 3,500 tonnes of crude oil and its 10 crew, which went missing while sailing from Tanjung Pinang, Indonesia to Langkawi island off Kedah, was found on Sunday - minus its cargo worth RM2.8 million.

He said the littoral states of the Melaka Strait and Singapore had put in place, cooperative arrangement in the form of the Melaka Strait Patrol (MSP) in 2004.

Anifah said the MSP comprised two components: the Melaka Strait Sea Patrol (MSSP) and the Eyes in the Sky (EiS) maritime air surveillance.

It had proven to be successful in reducing the number of piracy and armed robbery cases at sea (actual and attempted) in the strait and Singapore, from 38 cases in 2004 to just two cases last year.

Hence, Anifah said Malaysia called on all littoral states to strengthen further their cooperation under the existing framework, enhance the sharing of information and intelligence, as well as undertake collective efforts to ensure continued safety and security in the Melaka Strait.

On foreign assistance offers, Malaysia held the view that the littoral states had the primary responsibility in ensuring security in the strait and Singapore, he added.

"Such assistance would be limited to capacity building, sharing of information and intelligence, and such assistance should not impinge on Malaysia's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Meanwhile, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said a total of 28 ships and four aircrafts were dispatched for the search and rescue mission of the oil tanker.

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