

## Training centre to boost safety in Malacca Straits

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PORT KLANG - Maritime navigation safety in the Malacca Straits and beyond received a boost with the launch of a new training centre here. Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said safety along the straits was critical because of the routes' high economic value and heavy traffic.

"It is clear shipping remains vital to Asean regional development with over 80,000 ships transiting annually," he said when launching the Asean Regional Training Centre for Vessel Traffic Services (YTS) yesterday.

"The Malacca Straits is one of the busiest in the world and improving traffic management in the area is vital," Liow said. He said as the number of ships was expected to increase, a well-operated vessel traffic services centre was needed to manage possible risks.

"The increased shipping activity poses risks and threats which need to be mitigated," he said. "We must be prepared for potential maritime accidents, including any adverse effects on coastal and offshore infrastructure in a safe and efficient manner."

Equipment for the centre and operational costs will be borne by the Japanese government through its Japan-Asean Integration Fund, whose delegation was present at the launch. Japan's Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Keiichi Ishii and Vice-Admiral of the Japanese Coast Guard Shuichi Iwanami headed the delegation. Ishii said Japanese-Malaysian ties would be strengthened through cooperation on maritime issues.

"Japan has a long history of maritime cooperation in Asean and we hope to help our regional partners maintain a high level of safety along this vital shipping lane," he said. Specialised training equipment was purchased at a cost of US\$2.7 million (RM1.52 million) and the centre will host experienced YTS lecturers from Japan.

Officers engaged in YTS perform a similar role to air traffic controllers, alerting ships in narrow choke points and ports on heading direction and other information necessary for safe navigation through an area.

The centre is already conducting its first course, which ends on Oct 20, with each Asean member providing two participants with the exception of Brunei, whose personnel are occupied with other commitments.

Also present were ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Saripuddin Kasim, Marine Department director-general Datuk Baharin Abdul Hamid and ambassadors of Asean member countries. The training centre includes three rooms housing a ship simulator, with YTS officers playing out a series of scenarios specific to the narrow point of the straits off Port Klang to Gelang Patah in Johor bordering Singapore and Indonesia.

Separately, Liow announced Malaysia had launched a special team to investigate the collision between the guided missile destroyer USS John S. McCain and Liberian-registered oil tanker Alnic MC.

"We are working with both the Singapore and the US governments to assist and also look into, the incident. Our team will investigate what transpired that day," he said. The collision claimed the lives of 10 US sailors and was the fourth such collision this year involving US naval ships, leading to the commander of the US Seventh Fleet Vice-Admiral Joseph Aucoin being relieved of his duties.

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