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General

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Malaysia, Singapore And Indonesia Implement Cooperative Mechanism To Safeguard Straits

KUALA LUMPUR, May 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, the three littoral states, Tuesday officially implemented the Cooperative Mechanism for the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, 26 years after the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted.

Transport Minister Datuk Ong Tee Keat said the implementation would strengthen the roles of the three states in safeguarding one of the most important shipping lanes in the world.

"We are now taking the lead in ensuring navigational security and environmental protection of the Straits," he told reporters after officiating at the inaugural Cooperation Forum on the mechanism, here.

The mechanism is an initiative mooted under Article 43 of UNCLOS which aims to serve as a formal platform to promote voluntary cooperation between the littoral states and users of the Straits in enhancing safety of navigation and environmental protection of the Straits.

Under the Cooperative Mechanism, the littoral states and user states of the Straits also agreed to set up the Aids to Navigation Fund, which will be headed by Malaysia for the next three years.

"We want to get the commitment of the user states whose vessels ply the Straits so that they would also be responsible for the safety of the waterway and in protecting the environment there," said Ong.

He said as of now, the fund had US\$3.6 million contributed by the littoral states and various user states including Japan, Korea, Greece and the Gulf countries, which would be used for physical maintenance projects.

Under the Cooperative Mechanism, a Projects Coordination Committee (PCC) was also set up to oversee the implementation of projects in the Straits which include the removal of wrecks in the Traffic Separation Scheme in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, cooperation and capacity-building on hazardous and noxious substance preparedness and response in the Straits, and demonstration project of class B Automatic Identification System transponder on small ships.

The PCC also identified the setting up of tide, current and wind measurement systems for the Straits in order to enhance navigational safety and marine environment protection, replacement and maintenance of aids to navigation in the Straits and replacement of aids to navigation damaged by the tsunami in December 2004.

It was reported that a quarter of the world's seaborne trade and a quarter of all oil shipments carried by sea pass through the Straits yearly, while more than 12