



RMN SEA POWER CENTRE ONLINE COMMENTARY ON MARITIME ISSUES

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MALAYSIA A MARITIME NATION: STEERING THE COURSE

By Maritime Affair, RMN SPC

Malaysia is blessed with all the attributes of a maritime nation with continental roots. Our strategic location, between the Indian Ocean and the Asia Pacific region, makes us the focus of global maritime trade, whereby 90 per cent is via shipping.

In addition to maritime trade, our beautiful coastlines and islands are major attractions that boost tourism, while the bountiful resources in our waters, both living and non-living, provide important benefits to many economic sectors, ranging from aquaculture to the oil and gas industries.

The maritime sector's contributions towards the growth and dynamism of our economy will become more significant as we aspire to become a fully developed nation. While all sectors are substantial for our economic development,

exploitation of the relevant maritime resources must be carried out and managed sustainably for the well-being of the present and future generations.

While our maritime areas have provided so much for our nation as mentioned earlier, we are also aware that our marine ecosystem and biodiversity are being threatened by global warming, over-exploitation, and marine pollution. Therefore, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG), the Malaysian government is keen to adopt and implement the notion of a Blue Economy, where sustainable economic growth should align with maintaining the ocean's health.

In striking a balance between achieving economic growth and maintaining ocean health, the Blue Economy warrants proper planning and management of the maritime space. Central issues like pollution control, marine ecosystem health and sustainable fisheries should always be the guiding equilibrium to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG).

Optimising our country's wealth through maritime-based economic activities is interlinked with our ability to alleviate maritime security issues. Despite being bestowed with bountiful marine natural resources, enhancing revenue generation may only be possible if maritime security issues are promptly and strategically addressed.

Due to the dynamic maritime geopolitical environment, the challenges faced are not limited to traditional threats. Our maritime security is also greatly challenged by non-traditional threats such as illegal trafficking of goods and humans, Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported Fishing (IUU fishing), piracy, terrorism, threats to the marine ecosystem like climate change, as well as shipping and land-based pollution.

Therefore, we need to revisit our approach to managing our vast sea areas and marine resources. Over the years of becoming a mature nation, Malaysia has passed at least 15 Acts and Orders to manage our maritime space. Enforcement of this plethora of laws is entrusted to various agencies, cutting across more than 10 ministries and 31 maritime-related agencies.

If we continue to manage our seas in fragments, as it is now, the overlapping of jurisdictions and conflicts of interest between the sectors will never be resolved.

Going back to the notion of a Blue Economy and Sustainable Development Goals, the management of Malaysia's seas must be based on balancing the need to continue using the sea for economic activities without sacrificing the need to maintain security, safety, and the marine environment.

It has been the government's priority to enhance the integrity and minimise unscrupulous spending via leakages and wastage. We understand the government coffer has been drained excessively, especially after the post-COVID-19 pandemic. The global economic downturn has only worsened it, leaving the government the only option for wise and prudent spending.

Thus, it is high time for all maritime-related agencies to collaborate and consolidate necessary work processes. This effort can be achieved through greater understanding, trust, and open communication. Overlapping jurisdictions must be immediately addressed to overcome the wastage of government resources. A coordinated and integrated approach should be the answer to manage our maritime interests and resources securely and sustainably.

There is much to be done and many challenges to overcome for Malaysia to thrive as a Maritime Nation. However, our vision to become a Maritime Nation is becoming a reality, provided we are willing to join hands and march forward together.

