

**OPENING REMARKS BY MR CHEE HONG TAT, ACTING
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, AT THE 14th CO-OPERATION
FORUM, 31 JULY 2023 (MONDAY), 9.30AM, AT PARADOX
MERCHANT COURT SINGAPORE BALLROOM**

Dr Hartanto, Director of Marine Safety and Seafarers,
Directorate General of Sea Transportation, Ministry of
Transportation, Indonesia

Captain Mohamad Halim Bin Ahmed, Director General, Marine
Department, Malaysia

Professor Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-large, Ministry of
Foreign Affairs, Singapore

Mr Teo Eng Dih, Chief Executive, Maritime and Port Authority of
Singapore

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good morning.
2. To our guests from overseas, a warm welcome to Singapore.
3. I am pleased to join you at the opening ceremony of the 14th Co-operation Forum.

Importance of ensuring safe, free and efficient passage through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore

4. The Straits of Malacca and Singapore, or better known as SOMS, is one of the most critical waterways in the world.
 - a. It connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and serves as a vital maritime gateway connecting Asia and the Middle East, Europe, and Africa.

b. One-third of global trade and one-sixth of the world's total oil supply flows through this important strait.

c. Every year, over 100,000 vessels transit through the SOMS

5. Because of the high volume of traffic and the importance of the SOMS, congestion and accidents in this vital waterway can cause major delays with significant repercussions to the world economy and global supply chains.

a. When the container vessel, *Ever Given*, ran aground in the Suez Canal in 2021, Llyod's List estimated that the blockage disrupted over US\$9 billion worth of trade each day, or over US\$50 billion over those six days.

6. If such an incident were to occur in the SOMS, the cost would be even higher and its repercussions would be more severe. It is therefore very important for the international maritime community and littoral States to work together and undertake joint responsibility to ensure safe, free and efficient passage through the SOMS.

Good Progress of the Co-operative Mechanism

7. The Co-operative Mechanism, was established in 2007 with this goal in mind.

- a. The platform was designed to address matters of common interests concerning the SOMS,
- b. by bringing together relevant stakeholders to exchange information, discuss issues and challenges, as well as collaborate on initiatives to enhance navigation safety and environmental protection in the SOMS.

c. The Co-operative Mechanism exemplifies the spirit of Article 43 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas which urges user States and States bordering a strait to cooperate in working towards aiding international navigation and combatting pollution.

8. The Mechanism has since grown in strength and stature. It is now the central framework for international co-operation on matters concerning SOMS.

9. I would like to commend and thank the littoral States, key user States and industry partners for investing time, efforts and resources into advancing the important work of the Mechanism.

a. We have embarked on meaningful initiatives together, including the recently completed Joint Hydrographic Survey of the SOMS led by the Malacca Strait Council of Japan which started in 2018.

b. Despite the disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the littoral states and the Malacca Strait Council of Japan pressed on with their efforts. The survey was completed in August 2022 and the data collected has been used to update and create more detailed electronic navigational charts to enable better voyage planning and make it safer for users who sail through the SOMS.

Pillar 1 – Co-operation Forum

10. Today's Co-operation Forum is one of the three pillars of the Co-operative Mechanism where the littoral States and wider international maritime community discuss issues regarding the SOMS.

a. About 170 delegates from more than 60 countries and organisations are participating in this Forum.

b. The wide representation is testament to the value of this Mechanism and the strong support it receives from the global maritime community.

11. This year's Forum will include presentations and panel discussions on pertinent topics impacting the future of shipping, such as maritime autonomous surface ships, decarbonisation and ballast water management.

12. Various stakeholders will be proposing initiatives that could enhance navigational safety and environmental protection in the SOMS, such as to improve existing routeing measures¹ and develop standard operating procedures for incident response.

¹ Routeing measures (e.g. Precautionary Areas, No Anchoring Areas, Traffic Separation Scheme, etc.) contribute to the safety of life at sea, safety and efficiency of navigation, and/or protection of the marine environment. They are recommended for use by, and may be made mandatory for all ships or ships carrying certain cargoes when adopted and implemented in accordance with the guidelines and criteria developed by the IMO.

Pillars 2 and 3 – Aids to Navigation Fund and Project Co-ordination Committee

13. The second and third pillars of the Co-operative Mechanism – the Aids to Navigation Fund and the Project Co-ordination Committee – are also making good progress.

- a. Since its launch in 2007, the Aids to Navigation Fund (ANF) has received a total contribution of over US\$24 million from user States and industry associations.
- b. This has provided for the upkeep of the 51 critical aids to navigation in the Straits, making the waterway much safer for all users.
- c. I thank the donors for their generous contribution to this Fund, as well as our friends from Indonesia, which is currently chairing the ANF Committee, for their dedication and hard work.

- d. Under the Project Co-ordination Committee, a total of 13 projects have been launched since its inception in 2007, of which 11 have been completed.
- e. These projects, which included the removal of wrecks, replacement of Aids to Navigation damaged by the 2004 Tsunami, as well as trial of the Identification System Class-B Transponders on small ships, have greatly enhanced navigational safety and protection of the environment in the SOMS.
- f. I encourage user States and industry stakeholders to continue the collaboration with the littoral States to improve navigation safety and environmental protection of the SOMS.

Conclusion

14. Shipping is a dynamic and ever-changing industry that is constantly impacted by technological advancements, environmental developments and geopolitics.

15. We have been able to work together to keep the SOMS safe, open and clean for seaborne trade. However, we must not rest on our laurels.

16. The littoral States, user States and industry must remain focused and vigilant, and continue to work closely together to preserve and enhance navigational safety and environmental protection in the Straits.

17. This is a shared responsibility to keep global supply chains resilient and to protect the environment.

18. I am confident that the Co-operative Mechanism and its three pillars would continue to ensure safe, free and efficient passage through the SOMS.

19. On this note, I declare the 14th Co-operation Forum open and wish everyone a fruitful meeting.

20. Thank you.