

**Malaysia says foreign planes may help hunt pirates**By Mark Bendeich and **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Reuters) - Malaysia proposed on Tuesday that foreign surveillance planes help to fight piracy in the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest sea lanes, in its clearest invitation for international assistance.

Malaysia, along with neighbour Indonesia, has been cool to hints of an international role in policing the waterway but would allow maritime aircraft from nations such as the United States, Japan and Australia to use its domestic airspace.

"It's to be managed as an international effort by the international community," Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak told Reuters in an interview.

"Perhaps the international community can provide maritime aircraft for 24-hour surveillance over the Straits of Malacca. They can fly these aircraft but the consoles and monitors (inside them) can be operated by Malaysians, Indonesians and Singaporeans."

Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore guard the strait, which carries a quarter of global trade and nearly all oil imports for Japan and China. There are fears the waterway, already plagued by pirate attacks, could become a target for a terror attack.

The United States and Japan have offered help, but Malaysia and Indonesia in particular have resisted suggestions that foreign forces could operate within their territories. Sovereignty is the paramount concern for the littoral states.

It was widely reported last year that U.S. special forces or the Marines could be used as part of efforts to enhance security in the strait, provoking opposition from Malaysia and Indonesia.

Najib's comments are a departure from previous rhetoric. With piracy attacks rising after a lull following the Dec. 26 tsunami, there is growing pressure on the littoral states to do more.

He added that there could be a central communications post that would receive information from the foreign surveillance aircraft and relay it to naval and maritime police boats being used by the littoral states to patrol their respective waters.

The right of hot pursuit -- where one littoral state's patrol boat could cross maritime boundaries while chasing pirates -- is still not on the agenda, Najib said.

"The responsibility of the security of the Straits of Malacca primarily rests on the littoral states," he said. "The actual interdiction...will be done by Malaysian, Singaporean or Indonesian navy or maritime police patrol boats."

"Whatever we do must not jeopardise the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity," he added.

SECURITY-MALAYSIA-

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