

PM: Our defence needs are simple and modest

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By Sabry Sharif

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Malaysia's defence needs are simple and modest now that the Communist Party of Malaysia is no longer a threat to the peace and security of the country, the Prime Minister said today.

The country's need for some conventional weapons to demonstrate its defence capability did not entail the purchase of sophisticated and expensive weaponry.

"Malaysia is not about to keep up with the Joneses," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said when opening the second Defence Services Asia Exhibition and Conference (DSA), Asia's most prestigious defence show and conference at the

Putra World Trade Centre.

"We have already decided what kind of weapons we need, and how much we can afford. They are relatively simple and modest," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that although Malaysia is not an aggressive nation, it needed to defend its seas and territories.

He also said that defence preparedness was necessary to ensure stability for economic and social development.

Dr Mahathir and other guests later witnessed a fly-past by two Royal Air Force Tornado fighter jets brought here in conjunction with the exhibition and which Malaysia is now negotiating to buy from British Aerospace.

Malaysia's main defence

requirement since 1948 had been arms purchases to counter the communist insurgency.

However, last December, the CPM signed a peace accord with the Government after 41 years of protracted war of attrition which hardly required sophisticated and expensive weaponry.

Dr Mahathir hoped the arms industry could divert its research and energy to the needs of a world without a Cold War.

"The market for arms will shrink. It already has. We should not regret this," he said.

He believed that the energy, funds and research capabilities of the enormous arms industry could have non-military applications.

He said that weapons and electronic surveillance systems could be used against smuggling particularly against drug trafficking as now being applied in certain countries in South America.

"If these systems could be adapted for counter-smuggling work, and costs are reduced, it can sustain the arms industry or at least, its considerable expertise and resources in terms of innovations and inventiveness."

He reiterated that South-east Asia must be kept free from any superpower conflict and rivalry to ensure development and progress in the region.

"Any attempt or action

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not in keeping with Asean's Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (Zopfan) would not only hinder this objective but provide excuses for outside involvement in the region.

"This would be detrimental to our well-being and security," he added.

He pledged that Malaysia and other members of Asean would continue to strive for the realisation of Zopfan for Southeast Asia.

"Together with the member countries, Malaysia will also work towards a nuclear-free zone in this region."

On the holding of the exhibition and his presence, Dr Mahathir said, it should not be interpreted as an endorsement by the Government of the arms industry or an indication of Malaysia's intention to embark on an arms build-up.

"Malaysia has no wish to do so," he said, adding the arms industry, like the other industries too, were undergoing rapid changes and development.

He believed that Malaysia would be left behind if it did not keep abreast of these changes. "It is for this reason the Government supports the exhibition."

Earlier in his speech, the chairman of the DSA 1990 board of management, Tan Sri Hamzah Sendut said that the defence industry was a potent force for galvanising rapid industrial development.

He said that although there were a few who were sceptical on the future of defence industry especially with the emerging era of peace in the world, "we do not have to go far into history to find the necessity to remain vigilant."

More than 400 companies from 28 countries are taking part in the four-day exhibition.

The largest group are the 87 British companies which has regarded Malaysia as a major customer following the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Malaysian and British Governments in Sept 1988 on the sale of \$4.5 billion arms to the Armed Forces.