

# MAHATHIR: WE MAY BUY HAWK FIGHTERS

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## Tornado jets are too costly, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The Government is likely to cancel its plan to buy the British-made *Tornado* fighter jets because it is too costly and too sophisticated, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We have reviewed our plans ... the question is whether we need such (costly and sophisticated) jets," the Prime Minister said.

He said the Government had not make a final decision on the purchase of fighter aircraft "but we are likely to buy less expensive jets."

He said the Government would still buy from Britain as Malaysia had signed a memorandum of understanding with the British Government.

"We may buy (British Aerospace) *Hawk* fighters," he told newsmen after attending a rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the G15 summit at Parliament House.

The two governments signed the agreement to buy £1 billion (\$4.5 billion) worth of aircraft and other defence equipment two years ago.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on news reports that the Government had decided to cancel its plan to buy 12 *Tornado* jets, said to be worth £25 million (\$113 million) each.

News of the cancellation was first reported in the *Flight International* magazine and later *The Financial Times*.

The *Tornado* is manufactured by Panavia, a consortium of Anglo-German-Italian producers, while the *Hawk* is wholly made by BAE, which is also part of Panavia.

Dr Mahathir said today the Government was dealing with the British Government directly on the purchase of fighter jets as it had been criticised in the past for buying from private manufacturers.

"We were criticised because there were allegations of malpractices in buying directly from private manufacturers ... that is why we are now dealing on a government-to-government basis," he said.

He said that those who had made such allegations were "only looking for faults."