

# Govt may opt for Hawk jets

■ FROM PAGE ONE

for these equipment will be in cash and in kind, that is, counter trade which involve the sale of crude oil, natural gas and other goods.

In a related development, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir ticked off certain quarters who have expressed suspicions towards the arms deal with Britain.

"Previously, when Government arm deals were made directly with the arms manufacturers, these quarters raised suspicions of all kinds of hanky-panky and malpractices.

"The Government went into an arms deal at Government-to-Government level to assure them of our intentions. But even with the MOU with Britain, these same critics are still suspicious. I can't understand this. In my opinion, they are just trying to find fault with the Government," he said. — *By Ahirudin Attan*

# Govt may opt for Hawk jets

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MALAYSIA is likely to buy Hawk fighter jets instead of the Tornado under an arms deal with Britain, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Government has reviewed its earlier plans to purchase the Tornado, an expensive and highly sophisticated British fighter, under the £1 billion (£1=M\$4.56) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) it signed with Britain two years ago, he said.

"No final decision has been made yet, but it's likely that Malaysia will go for cheaper and less sophisticated fighters. It has to be a British fighter in view of the MOU ... maybe the Hawks," he told reporters after observing a dry-run for the G15 Summit in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir was responding to press reports on the issue. A Financial Times report on Tuesday said that Malaysia had cancelled the order for 12 Tornado jets it agreed to purchase under the MOU.

Defence Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen, however, refuted the story. He said negotiations are still going on and the Government had not made a decision.

The Tornado is a long-range fighter jet built by Panavia, Europe's three-nation consortium comprising UK's British Aerospace, West Germany's Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm and Italy's Aeritalia. British Aerospace is reportedly engaged in talks with Malaysia on the sale of its own Hawk fighter jets.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Government's reassessment of its earlier intention to buy the Tornados will be based on whether the country needs such expensive and sophisticated fighter planes.

The MOU involves the purchase of arms equipment including:

- Tornado interdictor-strike aircraft;
- £100 million communication package;
- Air defence radars;
- 155mm and 105mm field guns;
- A reconconditioned oberon-class submarine; and
- Ground-to-air missiles.

Under the agreement, the payment

Cont'd Back Page, Col., 5