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MALAYSIA CONSIDERING SOVIET'S OFFER OF DEFENCE EQUIPMENT  
Mahathir-Soviet.

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LANGKAWI, Nov 15 (Bernama) -- The government will study the Soviet Union's offer to sell it defence equipment, including jet fighters, under a package deal, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mahamad said today.

He said, the government, would have to determine whether the offer suited Malaysia's needs.

Defence equipment could be purchased from any country, including the Soviet Union, he told a press conference at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA '91) exhibition here.

+The Soviet Union is no longer a communist country and, in fact, they are using the Russian flag, not the Communist, one, here, + he said.

The Soviet Union recently offered to sell Malaysia sophisticated military equipment under a package deal that would include technology transfer.

Soviet Deputy Defence Minister Col-Gen Pyotz Deinikin, who is /Soviet Air Force Commander, met, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir on Tuesday. -- more

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The Soviet Union has the largest delegation at the exhibition involving about 150 companies and agents from 15 countries, including the United States, Britain and France.

The Prime Minister said Soviet equipment might appear a bit rough and unattractive but its capability and performance was equal if not better than that from the West.

Citing an example, he said the Sukhoi Su-27 jet fighter outshone other aircraft in terms of its short, take-off and tactical capability.

However, the government had to assess its defence needs and financial position before deciding, he added.

In December last year, the government opted to buy 28 Hawk light fighters -- 10 Hawk-10.0 and 18 Hawk-204 -- from British Aerospace at a cost of \$2 billion instead of the larger Tornado which costs more than \$5 billion a squadron, -- more

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+We are not going to war with anyone but just placing importance on our defence although our neighbours have sophisticated jets like the F-16 Fighting Falcon, + he said.

At a separate press conference at the aerospace section of LIMA '91, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najih Tun Razak said the Soviets made the offer when he visited the Soviet Union last month and also during his meeting with Col-Gen Deinikin here.

It was a general offer and there was nothing in black and white, he added.

The Soviets have brought the Mikoyan MiG-29 and Sukhoi Su-27 jet fighters, Mi-17 and Kamov Ka-32 helicopters and Ilyushin IL-76 and Antonov An-124 transport planes for the five-day exhibition which ended today.

The Antonov An-124 is the world's second largest transport aircraft.

Datuk Seri Najih said: +We will send a technical team to the Soviet Union to assess the equipment offered. + -- more

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The Soviets had offered to sell the Mikoyan MiG-29' and Kamov Ka-32 while Malaysia Airlines (MAS) was considering using the Antonov-124 for charter freight service, he added.. .

Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) pilots needed to fly in the Soviet jets to determine their capability, including in battle situations, he said.

Although Soviet weaponry was said to be cheaper than that of the West, Datuk Seri Najib said pricing was only one factor because technological capability and maintenance had to be considered when buying such equipment.

In the 80s, the Soviet Union had offered to sell the heavy and medium-lift helicopters to Malaysia but the government decided against buying after conducting a study. -- Rernama

▼15/11/16-28MST