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LIMA-Mahathir

BUYING MiG-29 WAS NO MISTAKE, SAYS MAHATHIR

LANGKAWI, Dec. 9 (Bernama) -- ⁹³ [⊙] Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he did not think that the government made a mistake by choosing the Russian MiG-29 superfighter for the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF).

Judging from its performance at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIAMA) exhibition 1993 here, the Prime Minister said the four MiG-29s put up an impressive show.

"They put up a great show... so we think we have not made a mistake by choosing the MiG-29," he added.

The MiG-29, which will feature prominently in Malaysia's air defence system, has been hogging the limelight in the aerial and static display despite the presence of the sophisticated American F/A-18 Hornet jetfighter which was also being acquired for the RMAF.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Center after meeting a high-level Russian delegation led by its First Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Matezov and the Commander-In-Chief of the Russian Air Force Peotz Deynekin. -- more

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Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced in June this year that the government would buy 18 MiG-29s under a billion-ringgit package deal which included a comprehensive off-set programme.

Najib said the aircraft manufacturer, Mikoyan Design Bureau, had agreed to accept payment partly in hard currency and partly in commodities.

Dr Mahathir said he was quite sure that the purchase contract would be signed soon.

As far as the government was concerned, he added, the decision had been made and it was now up to the technical people because "they know better what to buy".

"If we have more money, surely we will like to buy more (MiG-29)," he said when asked whether Malaysia was planning to increase its purchase of the superfighter in future.

Dr Mahathir also said that the government would like to upgrade contacts with Russia, especially in the fields of trade and economic cooperation.

"We have no differences with Moscow so, naturally, we would like to increase our relationship," he added. -- Bernama

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