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LIMA-Mahathir

AGREEMENT FOR PURCHASE OF RUSSIAN MIG AIRCRAFT TO BE SIGNED SOON

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LANGKAWI, Dec. 11 (Bernama) -- The agreement for the purchase of 18 MiG-29 jetfighters would be signed with the Russian government "very, soon", Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"I can't say exactly but I think very soon we will have to make a decision... maybe January, maybe February... I'm not very sure but very soon," he told Russian television and RTM in a special interview at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIAMA '93) exhibition here yesterday. RTM aired excerpts of the interview last night.

He said as far as the government was concerned the decision to buy the aircraft had been made and now it was left to the technical officials to determine that the specifications and the price were right.

"We have to have an aircraft that fulfills our need and it is known that the MiG engines have a shorter life span than engines made by western countries," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the two major demands made by Malaysia were for an engine with a longer life span and the mode of payment. -- more

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LIMA-Mahathir 2 Langkawi

"We would like to pay partly in cash and partly in commodities, which in any case the Russians are buying, maybe on a 50/50 basis or less," he added.

Instead of buying from elsewhere, the Russians could get the commodities directly from Malaysia, he said.

Dr Mahathir said there were no political considerations in the decision to buy the MiG-29 which Malaysia felt was a good fighter aircraft priced at a level that the government could afford.

"We chose the MiG with no idea of what political effect it may have but it is an expression of our freedom of choice. We are not guided by anybody," he added.

On prospects of acquiring more MiGs, he said, there could never be enough money for all the things needed for the defence of the country.

He added: "We have to buy quite a lot of equipment not just for the air force but also for the navy. At the moment we are looking into the replacement of 27 patrol boats.

"That (the patrol boats) is a long programme that is going to consume a lot of money and also we need money for a lot of necessary infrastructure within the country." -- more

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On the recent equipment orders for the armed forces, he said, its role had changed since its guerrilla fighting days.

"We need to oversee our Exclusive Economic Zone which means that we have now expanded our area of responsibility and, for that, we need new vessels, new aircraft and a totally new function for the military," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia was interested in buying more Russian goods, including military equipment, suitable for civilian use.

As an example, he said, the Russians had very good military harbour facilities that could be erected very quickly which could be put to civilian use. -- Bernama

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