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Joint venture to produce light field artillery

NAVAL Dockyard Sdn Bhd weapons engineering division has teamed up with British Aerospace Royal Ordnance to produce a 105mm light field artillery for the Malaysian army.

Dubbed the "Sakti" or Sistem Artileri Berteknologi Tinggi (High Technology Artillery System), production of the battle-proven weapon will start at NDSB's facility in Lumut, Perak, in January.

The gun was publicly unveiled by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday at Tanjung Malai, the venue for the Maritime Division of the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition (Lima '97).

The first gun is expected to roll off the assembly line in March, said NDSB weapons engineering division senior manager Abdullah Hitam.

He said that the gun exhibited at Tanjung Malai was built by Malaysian engineers from the company at BAe Royal Ordnance's facility in the United Kingdom as part of their training process under Phase I of the project's implementation.

The second phase, he said, would see NDSB assembling the weapon under the supervision of BAe Royal Ordnance with 20 per cent local content.

Under the third phase, local content will be increased to 40 per cent with detailed sub-assembly and manufacturing done through a vendor programme.

The major assembly works would involve 70 per cent local content under phase four, said Abdullah, adding that the target was set for two years.

He said to maintain quality control, NDSB would adopt standards set by BAe Royal Ordnance.

Although sales were at present focused on replacing some 150 light pack Howitzers belonging to the Malaysian Army, he said NDSB and BAe Royal Ordnance were negotiating to obtain rights for the former to market the product to third parties.

"We believe there is an immediate market for up to 40 units of the Sakti by the army which will begin evaluation of the product soon," he said.

Currently, some 400 units of the Sakti are operated by the United States army and have been deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina and during the Gulf War.

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