

11 MAR 1997

Syed Hamid-Rooivalk

PURCHASE OF ROOIVALK ATTACK CHOPPERS STILL UNDER STUDY

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- The government is still studying the offer to purchase the Rooivalk attack helicopters from South Africa, Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said today.

He said the final decision to purchase the aircraft depended on the financial allocation as well as the government's consent.

"So far I have not been informed on the final decision on the purchase of the Rooivalk, however they have made proposals to sell it," he told reporters after opening the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) Training For Trainers' Workshop here.

He was asked to comment on the report by a foreign news agency which claimed that Malaysia and South Africa had cut a deal for the purchase of the Rooivalk during the meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and President Nelson Mandela last week.

The report also claimed that Mandela would announce the move upon his return to Johannesburg after the his 10-day visit to Asean countries which ended yesterday.

"The South African air force has tested this aircraft and we will study it in detail before making a decision," he said.

Syed Hamid said at the same time Malaysia was also analysing proposals from other countries interested in selling their attack choppers like the Panther, Tiger, Krueger and Apache.

He said the South African proposal had been discussed several times prior to Mandela's visit to Malaysia.

So far both nations only signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation in the military security and research fields and not on the purchase of any specific hardware.

The MoU, signed last year was also for the establishment of a committee to discuss defence issues.

On France's interest in selling submarines to Malaysia, Syed Hamid said the government had made no decision on it adding that the proposal would be studied in detail before any decision was made.

He said the visit by France's Defence Minister Charles Millon to Malaysia was also to forge close relation in the defence industry as well as holding joint ventures in the field.

France had also offered military training and the sale of other military equipment to Malaysia.

The four-day workshop which begins today is to guide those involved in providing training for soldiers in peacekeeping missions nationwide.

The event, organised by the Malaysian and Australian defence ministries is being attended by 76 participants from 18 nations. -- BERNAMA

NI ZUL AO