

24 MAR 1997

M'SIA SAID TO BE CLOSE TO FINALISING DEAL TO RESCUE FOKKER

By: Mohd Rizal Razalli

KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysia may be close to sealing a deal to acquire a substantial portion of the debt-ridden Dutch aircraft manufacturer, NV Fokker, it was announced here today.

Henri ten Haveith, president and chief executive officer of Europe Management Consultants Sdn Bhd, a company working as an intermediary in the Fokker rescue in this region, said a team of officials from Khazanah Nasional Bhd, the government's investment arm, would leave for further negotiations in the Netherlands tonight.

"This means that Malaysia is now showing continuous interest in NV Fokker," he told reporters after the launch of Malaysian-Dutch Business Council here by the Minister of International Trade and Industry, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, here today.

ten Haveith said Khazanah officials would conduct a thorough study of the existing situation surrounding Fokker's bankruptcy.

If the negotiations proved to be fruitful, Khazanah Nasional may take up a 39 percent stake in Fokker's equity, he said, adding that this could rise to as high as 51 percent.

The balance of the equity would be held by the Dutch government and a Dutch company.

It is believed that the people involved in the rescue were considering a proposal that Andre Deleje, chairman of Begemann Group, a Dutch industrial firm, be made chairman of Fokker while Malaysian interests would put up part of the money for the rescue.

Khazanah Nasional may be required to pay an initial 450 million Dutch guilders (about RM685 million) for the 39 percent stake, said ten Haveith, who believed that the Malaysian party was taking a long-term view on the revitalisation of Fokker.

Recently, foreign agency reports said Khazanah and a group of international partners were studying a proposal to rescue Fokker, one of the oldest names in the world of aircraft making.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad confirmed on Feb 19 this year that Khazanah was studying proposal to participate in the rescue of the Dutch company.

Fokker was ranked as the fourth largest commercial aircraft manufacturer after Boeing Commercial Airplane Co, Airbus Industrie and McDonnell-Douglas Corp at one time.

Fokker's financial problems peaked in March last year when the company filed for bankruptcy following the withdrawal of its majority shareholder, Daimler-Benz of Germany. -- BERNAMA

RIZ SHY