

12 JAN 1998

Hamid-Cohen

NO NEW PURCHASE OF DEFENCE EQUIPMENT, US TOLD

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 12 (Bernama) -- Malaysia told the United States today that there would be no new purchase of defence equipment for its armed forces because of the country's economic downturn and the depreciation of the Ringgit.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said he conveyed the government's decision to US Secretary of Defence William Cohen who wanted to know Malaysia's policy on the matter.

Any expenses would be for the maintenance and servicing of existing defence equipment, he told reporters after Cohen called on him at Wisma Pertahanan here.

Cohen, who arrived here yesterday as part of his tour to several Asean countries, held a closed door discussion with Syed Hamid and the top brass in the armed forces. He also attended the two-day Pacific Dialogue which began today.

Syed Hamid said they also discussed bilateral issues and the United States in particular wanted to know Malaysia's stand on several issues especially defence and security under the present condition.

"Apart from discussing intelligence cooperation and efforts to enhance ties in defence science, I told him that all defence planning would continue," he said.

He said Cohen wanted to know whether Malaysia would continue to send military officers for training in the US under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Bilateral Training Consultancy Group (BITACG).

Syed Hamid said Malaysia would continue sending the office for training in selected fields since all expenses would be by the US.

Cohen was also told that Malaysia was satisfied with earlier discussion resulting in a five-year contract to maintain and service US Air Force Hercules C-130 aircraft at Airod.

Cohen who has good ties with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad since during his days as senator assured Malaysia that the US would continue to its ties with Malaysia under whatever situations, he said.

He believed the United States would continue its commitment to Malaysia and would be with Malaysia in good and bad times.

Syed Hamid also told Cohen of Malaysia's commitment to send its troops to serve with SFOR (Stabilisation Force) together with other troops from NATO and the United States in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the mandate expired in June.

"For the moment, the government's decision is to continue to deploy its troops pending the outcome of discussions in March," he said.

He said the discussion was to commit the continued participation for Nato and US forces in Bosnia and so far Malaysia had agreed to continue its commitment in that country. -- BERNAMA

ZAB ABG