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Malaysia, Russia to explore co-operation in defence, aviation

Hardev Kaur in Khabarovsk

MALAYSIA is exploring the possibility of greater co-operation with the Russian Federation in defence and aviation as well as increasing bilateral trade and investment.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Russian defence industry was quite big and focused.

Malaysia, he pointed out, has been building small aircraft which have been exported to the United States.

"But what we are doing now is to try and do modification on Russian aircraft, particularly the helicopters, for use in cloud seeding and in fire fighting - both forest fires and in highrise buildings," he told a Press conference here yesterday.

The helicopters are manufactured in Ulan Ude and Dr Mahathir is scheduled to visit Ulan Ude in Buryatia on Friday and see for himself "how we can co-operate with them."

Dr Mahathir, on the first full day of his three-day visit to the Khabarovsk Territory, visited the "defence city" at Komsomolsk-na-Amure.

He toured the plant for two hours during which a Russian military officer, Colonel Mikhail Romanov, demonstrated some of the capabilities of the Sukhoi SU-27 fighter aircraft. Following the demonstration flight, Dr Mahathir said he was impressed with the aircraft.

Today, Dr Mahathir will visit the Khabarovsk Shipbuilding Yard where hydrofoil boats are built. The Prime Minister said he wanted to see whether the boats are suitable for ferrying passengers in Malaysia, adding, "if they are suitable, we may buy".

The Russians also have specialised amphibious aircraft which are not manufactured in the West, adding that "we will look again to see whether they are suitable for Malaysia or not."

Asked whether Malaysia would send people for training in the aircraft industry to Russia, Dr Mahathir said if at all, the training would only be for the Fulcrum (MiG-29).

Malaysia bought 18 MiG-29s in 1995.

On investments, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia assembled television sets in Russia, besides the investments of Rimbunan Hijau in logging in Khabarovsk. The Prime Minister was briefed on Rimbunan Hijau's investments and activities by its managing director Tan Sri Tiong Hiew King.

On Rimbunan Hijau, he said Malaysia may have to import softwood from the temperate countries for the furniture industry, adding that, "we many find pinewood useful."

The Prime Minister said those who wanted to invest abroad, such as in Russia, the companies must raise funds abroad and not from Malaysia.

"At the same time, we want to sell things and we believe in a win-win situation whereby you contribute to the local economy and help it to prosper so that they can buy more from us."

On the possibility of Malaysia Airlines having direct flights to Khabarovsk, he said there was a need for sufficient passenger load before it can fly here.

Earlier in the day, the two delegations had bilateral discussions. Dr Mahathir briefed his hosts, Governor of Khabarovsk Victor Ishaev, on Malaysia's economy and the steps taken to overcome the crisis.

Dr Mahathir explained that Malaysia did not go to the International Monetary Fund as the country did not want "unlimited exploitation of our

companies", adding that "we value our independence."  
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