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Mahathir-Aircraft

RUSSIAN PILOT PUTS ON DAZZLING SHOW FOR MAHATHIR

By: Azman Ujang

KOMSOMOLSK-ON-AMUR (Russia), Aug 16 (Bernama) -- It was a proud day for Russian fighter pilot Col Mikhail Romanov who put on a dazzling display of his skills specially for visiting Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, here, Monday.

Romanov spiked the skies aboard the pride of the Russian Air Force, the Su-27, which, like the other range of Sukhoi or Su series of heavy and long-range fighters, is made at a production plant which the prime minister toured.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived in Khabarovsk Sunday, was flown to this defence industry city some 400km away aboard a Russian-made TU 134 commercial jet aircraft.

He was accompanied by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha and Malaysian ambassador to Russia Datuk Yahya Baba.

Romanov's air show for the prime minister took place after Dr Mahathir spent about two hours touring the various sections of the huge plant, which started production in 1936.

It is one of the largest Russian aircraft manufacturers and its latest production is fourth generation Su fighters.

Dr Mahathir was highly impressed with the display, especially as the Su-27 flew low in slow motion and quietly, close to where he and other officials were seated on a mounted dais.

Shortly after landing his aircraft, the pilot was taken to meet the prime minister.

"You are a very good pilot and I am very impressed," he told Romanov through an interpreter.

Asked by a Russian television reporter what he thought of the Su-27, Dr Mahathir said: "It is very impressive."

"Will your air force consider buying one?," shouted another Russian reporter.

" Well...if we could afford it," said the prime minister with a smile.

According to information released by the plant, about 2,000 units of the Su-series of fighter and bomber aircraft have been delivered to 18 countries.

They have become the backbone of attack aviation for the air forces of Egypt, Bulgaria, Syria, Iraq, India, Peru, Angola, Afghanistan, Algeria, Vietnam, South Korea, Hungary, Yemen and Germany.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir was also shown the Be-103 multipurpose amphibious five-passenger aircraft with a Petronas logo painted on it, apparently for delivery to the Malaysian national oil company.

It is suitable for use on rivers and lakes for forest fire surveillance, sea patrols, recreation and tourism.

Asked upon returning to Khabarovsk about his visit to the fighter aircraft plant, Dr Mahathir told Malaysian reporters: "I'm just looking at the aircraft. I'm not buying".

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