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PM gets the feel of hovercraft technology

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today got a feel of British hovercraft technology when he took a ride on a craft used by a British Royal Marines commando brigade.

Dr Mahathir sat in the commander's chair of the diesel-powered Griffon 2000TDX(M) hovercraft as he went for a 30-minute spin on the lake of the Mines Beach Resort Hotel at Seri Kembangan, near here.

Before boarding, he was briefed on the craft's mechanical features and capabilities by Capt Phil Bourne.

Asked about the hovercraft's capabilities, Dr Mahathir said: "It was a very good experience. It is certainly very manoeuvrable. Quite comfortable, except that part when we had to turn around, otherwise it performed perfectly as described by the promoters."

The hovercraft is produced by British company, Griffon Hovercraft Limited, which is providing backing to a Bumiputera-majority owned company Dawn Aqua Sdn Bhd formed to bring hovercraft technology to Malaysia.

Dawn Aqua is helmed by former Royal Malaysian Navy chief Laksamana Madya (R) Tan Sri Abdul Wahab Nawi. It has a total transfer of technology package agreement with Griffon and an exclusive licence to build the full range of Griffon hovercraft in Malaysia.

Approached by reporters after the demonstration, the Prime Minister said no decision had been made on acquiring hovercraft for the country's defence forces.

The hovercraft that Dr Mahathir rode will be displayed at the DSA2000 defence show at the Mines Exhibition Centre beginning Tuesday.

It was supplied to the Royal Marines in 1995 and is operated by its 539 Assault Squadron, 3 Commando Brigade.

It can carry a crew of two (driver and commander) and 16 fully equipped marine commandos and can reach a speed of 50 knots.

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