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French defence industry expects to clinch deals soon

FRENCH companies specialising in maritime and aerospace defence equipment are hoping to clinch soon four or five deals which are pending with Malaysia.

The transactions, which include those for a submarine, helicopters and artillery, form part of some 30 on-going negotiations between the French and other governments around the globe.

"We are hoping to conclude shortly the submarine deal which has been on-going for the past 10 years with the Malaysian Government," Lieutenant General Philippe Roger, the French Ministry of Defence General Directorate for Armament's director of International Relations told a Press conference yesterday.

Outlining the French Government's three-pronged approach to bilateral relations in the field of defence, Roger said these were carried out via policy, operational and equipment levels.

"Our assessment of bilateral relationships with Asean states and in particular Malaysia, is very good. We think we have now built the necessary legal frameworks, allowing us to execute the strong co-operation directives that we receive from both sides."

French Minister of Defence Alain Richard said Roger would lead a delegation from his country to Lima '01 this week, after which he is due to meet with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur.

The French defence industry recorded a turnover of 15 billion euros (RM53 billion) last year, of which export sales figures made up half the total.

"The most important contracts are signed with Singapore and we are also eyeing India as big market," Roger said.

When asked to indicate the spending patterns of Asian governments on defence hardware equipment, Roger said this hinged on the economic climate.

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