

06 AUG 2001

Mahathir-Submarine

MALAYSIA HAS YET TO DECIDE ON SUBMARINES

LUMUT, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- The government has yet to decide on the type of submarines to buy but will give priority to local capability, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the government would emphasise local capability and participation before making a decision.

"There's a decision to buy. We are interested in everything," he said when asked whether the government had decided to buy two submarines which are being refurbished at the PSC-Naval Dockyard here.

Asked whether the purchase of used submarines would endanger the lives of the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) crew, he said: "These have not set sail yet. They can be improved on."

The prime minister said this at a media conference at the end of his one-day visit to the RMN base here which included a tour of the submarines and launching the Lumut Navy Hospital.

Present were Perak Menteri Besar Perak Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and defence Forces chief Jen Tan Sri Mohd Zahidi Zainuddin.

PSC-Naval Dockyard was recently awarded a contract by Netherland-based RDM Submarines NV to refurbish and upgrade two conventional submarines, Zwaardvis and Tijgerhaal, which it later intends to offer for lease to the government as a training platform.

On his visit to the RMN base, Dr Mahathir said he was impressed and proud of its development.

"The last time I came was in 1984. I'm impressed by the number, size and sophistication of the boats," he said.

He also said that the cleanliness and discipline there showed good maintenance.

He said he was confident of the RMN personnel's ability to master new warfare technologies and to defend the nation.

On the PSC-Naval Dockyard, he said it had achieved commendable development and its staff had increased to 1,200 from 280 when it was taken over by PSC.

"Now it not only does repairs and maintenance but also manufactures cranes and crane containers," he said.

-- BERNAMA

AR KAY AHH JK