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National air defence will continue to get priority

Tony Emmanuel in London

THE Defence Ministry will continue to give priority to national air defence and study proposals forwarded for arms procurement.

"It has and will continue to remain the priority of our national defence policy," Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said at the Malaysian High Commission on Monday.

On plans to purchase the Russian-made multirole combat aircraft, the Sukhoi 30, he said:

"We haven't made a firm decision as there are various things to consider."

Najib arrived here over the weekend and called on British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon on Monday morning.

Later, he conferred the "stars" on Kol Kamaruddin Mattan, the commission's defence attache, who was recently promoted to Brigadier-General at the Malaysian mission.

Najib visited a defence exhibition at the Excel Exhibition Centre at London's Docklands yesterday.

On his meeting with his British counterpart, Najib said discussions revolved around bilateral and defence co-operation.

"We are keen to involve British companies in the transfer of technology for defence-related industries."

For example, Najib explained that the Super Lynx helicopter, acquired for the Royal Malaysian Navy, was one facet of co-operation presently underway.

After his visit to London, Najib will accompany Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Russia and several other European countries.

On another matter, Najib said the Defence Ministry was taking a serious view over the arrests of two military personnel on Saturday in connection with a bank robbery reported in Malacca last week.

"We need to accelerate our plans to implement various measures needed to tackle the problem."

The measures include introducing skills and professional courses for servicemen, besides the routine rigorous training.

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