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Syed Hamid-Mahathir

PM VISITING RUSSIA TO RENEW TIES, NOT TO FINALISE DEAL

RAWANG, Sept 10 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's four-day trip to Russia, beginning Wednesday, is an official visit to renew ties with Moscow and not to finalise any deals, the Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said.

" There is no intention to go there in order to finalise any purchase, acquisition or procurement, that is not the purpose of the visit," he told reporters here today.

He was responding to questions whether the Prime Minister would finalise the deal to purchase of the Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30 combat aircraft while in Moscow.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir would use the trip to renew bilateral ties with Russia and his friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin whom he last met during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Forum in Brunei last year.

He said the visit would also enable Dr Mahathir to keep abreast with the latest development in bio-technology and aerospace in particular.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to visit Russia's bio-tech and meteorological centres and witness a demonstration by Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets.

On the proposed purchase of the Russian aircraft for the Royal Malaysian Air Force, Syed Hamid said there was no decision yet and Malaysia was still studying it.

Plans to acquire such aircraft were reportedly put on hold because of the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Syed Hamid said that during a stop-over in London on Wednesday, Dr Mahathir will meet Malaysian students at the Malaysian High Commissioner's residence before calling on the British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

After Russia, Dr Mahathir will visit Germany for three days from Sept 18 at the invitation of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

While in Berlin the prime minister will open the chancery building of the Malaysian embassy there, Syed Hamid added.

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