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Russia-Sukhoi
RUSSIA LOBBYING MALAYSIA TO BUY SUKHOI SU-30

By: Khairdzir Yunus

MOSCOW, Sept 18 (Bernama) -- If not for the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and Pentagon in Washington on Sept 11, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would have visited Russia from Sept 12 to 15.

The uncertainty caused by the devastating attacks forced Dr Mahathir to postpone his trip not only to Russia but also to the United Kingdom and Germany to a more suitable time.

While Russia understands Malaysia's reason for the postponement, it is eagerly looking forward to Dr Mahathir's visit at another time.

The visit, at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is aimed at enhancing trade and bilateral ties, and Russia wants to take the opportunity to show Dr Mahathir the capability of the Sukhoi SU-30 fighter jets.

Russia is actively lobbying Malaysia to buy the Sukhoi SU-30 at a time when the United States is also pushing to sell its newest strike fighter, the Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet.

Boeing vice-president and business development general manager for military aircraft and guided missiles, George Roman, has said that the Super Hornet represented the latest technology in fight jet manufacturing and Malaysia was considered a part of its F/A-18 Hornet programme.

Boeing would send two Super Hornets to the 6th Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) exhibition this October to show the tactical capability of the fighter jet, he said when visiting Kuala Lumpur last June.

LIMA will be the fourth international airshow to see the presence of the Super Hornet as it had been displayed at the Paris air show, in Australia and Finland.

Russia will also make its presence felt in Langkawi. Rosboronexport, the agency responsible for export of Russian defence technology and equipment, considers the Asia-Pacific one of its important markets.

Rosboronexport deputy director-general Victor Komazdin said most countries in the region had recovered from the 1997/1998 economic crisis and their economies were growing.

"Leaders and governments in this region seem to be of the view that now is the time to think about meeting their own security needs," he told Malaysian journalists in an interview at his office in Goglevsky Blvd, Moscow, recently.

Komazdin gave his answers in Russian and they were translated into Bahasa Malaysia by Utusan Malaysia's correspondent in Moscow, Svet S. Zakharov.

Komazdin views Asia-Pacific as a big market for fighter jets, and according to Western experts' estimates, the Asia-Pacific market until 2010 is worth US\$20 billion.

"That is why we are paying serious attention to LIMA to make our presence felt in this region.

"We also consider Russia's participation in LIMA as crucial to Malaysia-Russia bilateral ties," he said.

He said to show its seriousness, Russia would send more than 300 Russian military technology items for display at LIMA, including various types of aircraft, models and replicas involving 30 companies in the defence industry.

He said Russia made its breakthrough in Malaysia by selling 18 MiG29s to the government in 1994. "That marked the start of our venture into the Asia-Pacific market."

"Since we have good experience supplying the MiG29, we gave to the Malaysian side a commercial proposal to supply armoured vehicles, tanks, anti-aircraft missiles and navy vessels for the Royal Malaysian Navy. We see it reasonable to continue cooperation in the aircraft sphere," he said.

"Now that we know Malaysia plans to renew its fighters and is considering different proposals from many countries on the procurement of new aircraft, Russia would also like to participate in this project," he said.

He said Russia was really hoping that Malaysia would consider buying the SU-30 and could assure Malaysia of its quality and effectiveness.

He said: "Dr Mahathir has said that Malaysia is prepared to be a market platform for Russia's defence equipment in the Southeast Asian and Asia-Pacific regions."

He said trade ties between the two countries were good and bilateral trade had reached US\$300 million.

"Our cooperation in the military field has no political ties...no political conditions like those attached by others in their offers," he said.

He said Rosboronexport was joining the fray to sell two types of aircraft -- the MiG-29 Multirole fighter aircraft and Sukhoi SU-30, a basic aircraft.

The SU-30 could be customised according to Malaysia's needs, he said.

He said that so far only India and China had made orders for the SU-30

Asked if he considered the SU-30 superior to Super Hornet, he said both were good aircraft.

"However, in the purchase of defence equipment, the factor of good ties between countries also plays an important role. For example, European countries know of the strengths of Russian jets but still buy American aircraft because they want to join NATO.

"The sale of weapons is very closely linked to politics. Russia builds aircraft according to Russian traditions. Our guarantee is that our aircraft are very easy to handle.

"Our vision in building aircraft is to allow the pilot to make his own decision. But in America it is different; they want it the easy way and let the computer make the decision for pilots. The American psychology differs from ours, and this is reflected in the aircraft built by both countries," he said.

Asked for his view on stability in Southeast Asia, he said: "I think Malaysia will be a regional superpower as long as it is under the leadership of Dr Mahathir."

Meanwhile, president of Irkutsk Aviation Industrial Association, JSC, Alexey I. Fedorov, the maker of the SU-30 aircraft, said India was purchasing quite a number of the SU-30 aircraft, and there were plans to incorporate the Yarkhont cruise missile, one of the most advanced missiles.

Fedorov, who considers the Boeing F18 Super Hornet as a serious competitor, expressed hope that the company could sell the SU-30 aircraft to Malaysia.

"We are going to carry out flight demonstrations of the latest version of the SU-30 during the LIMA exhibition for the first time in Southeast Asia," he said.

At LIMA, Irkutsk also plans to display its BE200 amphibious aircraft.

The Russian government has ordered seven such aircraft which are mainly used for forest firefighting, and search and rescue operations.

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