

# RMAF to evaluate US, Russian fighters

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## Decision on Flanker or Super Hornet

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KUANTAN, Fri. The Royal Malaysian Air Force will be sending a team each to Russia and the United States to evaluate the Sukhoi SU-30MK Flanker multi-role fighter jet and the Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet.

The Government, said Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, would study the reports of the two teams before deciding on the fighter jet for the RMAF.

Najib said the first team would leave for Russia in the middle of this month while the second team would go to the United States next month.

"They will be away for a week or two depending on the situation and availability of information and sup-

port," he said after attending an Appreciation Night last night.

The Appreciation Night was for the pilots and ground crew of the MiG 29N Fulcrum jets from the 19th Squadron in Kuantan, F/A 18D Hornets from 18th Squadron in Butterworth and the 16th Squadron last night.

"After completing their evaluation, the teams will submit their reports to me and I will discuss the matter with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad before the Government makes its decision."

At the Appreciation Night, the pilots repeated their performance and display of skills demonstrated at the 2001 Langkawi International Aerospace and Maritime Exhibition.

On whether the purchase would be made this year, Najib said it

would depend on a few factors, including the financial capability of the Government.

"However, there is a need for us to develop the RMAF," he said.

Earlier in his speech, Najib said the Government was considering either the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet or the Sukhoi SU-30MK Flanker to increase the fighter capability of the RMAF.

"When I first became the Defence Minister (during the purchase of the F/A 18D Hornets and MiG 29N Fulcrum jets) I was directly involved in the decision to acquire, for the first time, a fleet of advance fighter planes for the RMAF.

"Now, I will also be directly involved in the decision on our new multi-role combat aircrafts.

"We want to make sure the RMAF would emerge as a very credible air force team."