

# ***Malaysia buys all-purpose Russian copters***

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## **New fleet will replace ageing Nuris**

MOSCOW: Malaysia is buying 10 Mi-17/i helicopters from Russia to replace the Royal Malaysian Air Force's (RMAF) ageing Nuris, said Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said yesterday that the medium-lift utility helicopters would be used for medical evacuations, search and rescue air landed supplies, transportation and communication flights.

Najib, who had two years ago said that his ministry was planning to buy such helicopters but was waiting for an increase in the defence budget, however, declined to reveal the cost of the helicopters. But it is learnt that

each basic model would cost about US\$5mil (RM19mil).

Two Mi-17s have been in use by the Fire and Rescue Department since 1998 for rescue purposes. Najib is here to accompany Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is on a four-day official visit to Russia.

The Malaysian delegation yesterday also attended a flight demonstration of SU30 aircraft at the Zhukosky Aviation Institute.

Dr Mahathir had visited the manufacturing plant in Ulan Ude, in eastern Siberia in 1999, when he was given a demonstration of the helicopter's capabilities.

Malaysia has been looking

to purchase new multi-role combat aircraft and other equipment from Russia. The Russian Government had formed a special committee to oversee military co-operation, especially in export of military products.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had during a bilateral meeting with Dr Mahathir on Thursday expressed satisfaction with the good co-operation in military and defence areas between both countries.

Dr Mahathir had said that Malaysia was looking into the possibility of purchasing military equipment from Moscow.

The RMAF has been using 18 Russian-made MiG-29 fighter aircraft since 1995.