

Malaysia to buy 10 Russian helicopters

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MOSCOW Fri. — Malaysia will buy 10 Russian Mi-17 utility helicopters to replace the ageing Nuri helicopters, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said.

The medium lift utility helicopters can be used for medical evacuation, transportation, supplies, search and rescue, and communication.

While Najib declined to disclose the price, it is understood that the basic models cost about US\$5 million (RM19m) each. Najib is accompanying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is on a four-day official visit to the Russian Federation.

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

Yesterday, he visited the Zhu-

kosky Aviation Institute, accompanied by other members of the Malaysian delegation, and given a demonstration of SU30 aircraft.

Malaysia had been looking to purchase new multi-role combat aircraft and other equipment from Russia.

Dr Mahathir, after the bilateral talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, had said that Malaysia was looking into the possibility of purchasing military equipment from Moscow.

Putin expressed satisfaction with the good co-operation in military and defence area between both countries

Moscow had formed a special committee to oversee military co-operation, especially in export of military products.

Malaysia began using 18 Russian-

made MiG-29 fighters aircraft in 1995.

Dr Mahathir also visited the bio-organic chemistry centre of the academy of science, and had a meeting with the Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov at the White House.

He later performed Friday prayers at the Prospect Mira mosque – the oldest mosque in Moscow – and made a US\$10,000 contribution to the Muslim community in the City.

Chairman of the Russian Mufti Council, Ravil Gainutdin, the head of the Muslim community in Moscow, received the contribution.

The Muslim community in Moscow is estimated at 1.5 million out of a population of 10 million. There are some 20 million Muslims in Russia.