

23 MAR 2002

Mahathir-Tank

MALAYSIA TO BUY POLISH TANKS

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

WARSAW, March 23 (Bernama) - Malaysia has decided to buy the PT-91 main battle tank from Poland, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here Saturday.

The details of the purchase including the price and conditions would be discussed by officials, he told a press conference at the end of his three-day visit to Poland.

"We haven't decided on the actual number but at the moment the decision is only to purchase tanks although we have been shown bridge layers and others. Our decision now is only to purchase the main battle tanks," he said.

Dr Mahathir had witnessed a demonstration on the capability of the PT-91 tanks and shown several other support armour vehicles at the 1st Tadeusz Kosciuszko Armoured Brigade in Wesola, about 30km from here on Thursday.

On the decision to buy the tanks, he said the government had evaluated the weapons system of many countries and knew the relative merits of each of the weapons.

"We have decided in the case of the main battle tank to acquire from Poland because of the merits, not because of your pressure," he told the Polish journalist who asked if the decision was influenced by the activity of the Polish government, his visit to the brigade or pressure from the media.

According to its manufacturer Bumar Labedy, the tank is equipped with, among other things, fire control system with thermal imager, day/night fire on move capability, 125mm main gun with autoloader and laser beam warning system with smoke grenade launchers.

Asked if the purchase would tied on a package basis such as the transfer of technology and commercial considerations in terms of probable counter-trade with Poland, Dr Mahathir said there would of course be various offset arrangements in order to benefit both sides.

"We are interested in the export of palm oil and maybe part payment in terms of kind rather than in cash.

"There will be other discussions on technology transfer and manufacturing in Malaysia. These are details that will be work out by the officials," he said.

Asked by another Polish reporter what portion of the purchase would be paid in palm oil and whether other commodities would be involved, the Prime Minister said he could not reveal the amount at the moment and that any Malaysian product was possible for the arrangement.

"Of course, if you want to take 100 per cent palm oil is possible, all these things are up for discussion," he said.

Another reporter asked if Malaysia would buy naval logistic support equipment like boats and helicopters from Poland, Dr Mahathir said this would be studied by the government.

The Prime Minister flew to the port city of Gdansk, 400km from here yesterday to witness the demonstration of navy vessels and marine rescue helicopters.

"I must admit the demonstration on the helicopters in particular was very impressive," said Dr Mahathir, who is the first Malaysian Prime Minister to visit Poland since diplomatic relations between the two countries started 30 years ago.

"We also know about your manufacturing capability not only in defence

equipment but also other equipment like cranes. Our private sector will look into cooperating with these manufacturers in order to avail ourselves with Polish equipment," he said.

Dr Mahathir arrived in Poland on Thursday on the last stop of his nine-day, three nation visit that had also taken him to Russia and Germany.

On the whole, he said the visit had been successful as Malaysia had been able to make good contacts with the respective governments and business sector.

"We have been able to explain the opportunities for doing business, for investment and for cooperation," said Dr Mahathir who was accompanied by a 100-strong business delegation apart from senior government officials during the trip.

-- BERNAMA

AZZ AZZ RV AO