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Malaysia will buy Polish tanks (HL)

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IT is confirmed. Malaysia is buying the PT-91 main battle tank from Poland to boost its defence capabilities.

The announcement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at a Press conference yesterday means this will be the country's first real combat tank. Currently it only has light Scorpion tanks in its armoury.

"We have made up our minds already. We will buy the Polish tank and now it is up to the officials of both sides to work out the details of the purchase," he said in response to the first question from the Polish media at the conference held at the end of his three-day official visit to the republic.

The reply seemed to have pleased the Polish Press delegation which had been seeking a firm answer from him throughout the visit.

The PT-91 tank is an upgraded version of the famed T-72, dubbed the Russian Tank, which has gained a reputation as a mean machine.

The Prime Minister, accompanied by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, had spent about two hours watching a demonstration of the tank on Thursday.

The tank has impressive mobility and is said to have a top speed of 60km per hour, very fast for a 45-tonne chunk of steel.

It also has state-of-the-art firepower with day and night vision capabilities.

Details of the purchase to be worked out include crucial elements like the cost and payment arrangements as well as how many of the tanks would be acquired and when.

Dr Mahathir said payments, for instance, could be made in kind through the export of palm oil.

At the moment, however, Malaysia has decided only to settle for the main battle tanks and not other logistical support vehicles like tank recovery armoured vehicles and anti-aircraft support tanks.

Asked whether the decision was due to pressure from the Polish Press, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had been evaluating military equipment from several countries.

"So if we decide to buy, it is because we want to buy and not because of any pressure from anybody," he added.

It is understood that one of the factors considered was the economic spin-offs expected to result from the purchase. Apart from a boost to palm oil exports, support industries are expected to be established to complement the tank batteries.

The Prime Minister was also asked to sum up his whirlwind tour of the north-eastern part of Europe which has taken him to three countries - Russia, Germany and Poland - in less than two weeks.

"It has been a useful visit. Useful contacts have definitely been established with the Government and business sectors of the countries and I'm glad to say that we have been well received."

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