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Najib-Purchase

NEW DEFENCE PURCHASES TO BENEFIT LOCAL ECONOMY, SAYS NAJIB

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

WARSAW, March 20 (Bernama) -- New defence purchases will from now on take a broader perspective so as to generate spin-offs for the Malaysian economy, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said here Wednesday.

"Gone are the days that we go for straightforward purchases. Now we have to look in terms of what the other countries can also buy from Malaysia," he told Malaysian journalists who are here to cover the visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad beginning Thursday.

The Defence Ministry would ensure that the defence requirement for the country would also lead to spin-offs for the national economy, Najib said prior to talks with his Polish counterpart, Jerzy Szmajdzinski, here.

"It should not be a total outflow in terms of foreign exchange but how you can leverage that purchase to stimulate economic growth for the nation.

"We are going to structure all our deals to benefit the local economy, not necessarily connected with defence alone but it can be beyond the defence sector," said Najib who arrived here Tuesday night to join the Prime Minister's delegation for the three-day official visit.

He said the policy would be implemented from now on for all major defence purchases including for the government's consideration to buy main battle tanks from Poland and the Russian offer for Malaysia to purchase its Sukhoi SU-30.

Najib was in Russia last week to accompany Dr Mahathir on the prime minister's first stop of his current three-nation visit. While there, they witnessed a demonstration of the SU-30 which Malaysia is considering to buy.

Dr Mahathir will arrive from Germany Thursday for yet another action-packed programme that would include talks with his Polish counterpart, Leszek Miller, and a meeting with President Aleksander Kwasniewski.

He will also witness a demonstration of the main battle tank here and fly to Gdansk for a show by the Polish Navy fleet.

Najib said Poland was very keen to sell their T-72 or PT-91 main battle tank to Malaysia.

He is scheduled to visit the factory at Gliwice-Laberdy, 400km from here, after talks with the Polish minister.

"I'm sure that during my discussion with the minister, he will indicate the keen interest of the Polish government to sell the tanks to us," Najib said.

At this stage, the government had not made any decision on the offer as it was evaluating a few options.

Apart from the technical aspects and capability of the tanks, the government would consider the commercial offer in terms of what the Polish government could provide in areas such as counter-trade, loans and transfer of technology, he said.

Stating that other countries had also made a strong pitch to sell their battle tanks to Malaysia, Najib said the competition was quite keen.

He said the government had not fixed the number of the tanks to buy but "ideally we should talk about a regiment of tanks". This would be three batteries and one battery for reserve and training.

"One battery varies according to the kind of philosophy that each army adopts but basically we are talking of 12 to 16 tanks per battery," he said.

He said a team of officers from the army Armour Corps sent here to evaluate the main battle tanks was now ready to report back to him on their findings.

-- BERNAMA

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