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Mahathir-Sukhoi
MALAYSIA MAY BUY SUKHOI S-30, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

MOSCOW, March 16 (Bernama) - Having seen the performance of the Sukhoi SU-30, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia would consider acquiring the Russian-built multi-functional jet fighter.

The Prime Minister, who witnessed a demonstration of the aircraft's manoeuvrability yesterday said it was "very impressive".

"I admit that the performance was very impressive and certainly we would consider acquiring this version of the Sukhoi when we discuss the alternatives that are available for us," he told a press conference here before leaving for Stuttgart, Germany after a three-day official visit.

"If we decide to purchase the Sukhoi, we would expect some offset programme including participation in the testing if possible and putting in Malaysian modifications," he said.

Malaysia would also be interested to participate in the assembly of aircraft, he said.

The possibility of Malaysia acquiring some military aircraft from Russia was among the topics raised in his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the government would assess the capabilities of the SU-30 in terms of its technical aspects and commercial value before making a decision.

"We had sent an evaluation team to conduct tests on the aircraft in Russia last month and they have prepared a report to the Ministry of Defence," he told Malaysian journalists covering the Prime Minister's visit.

Besides the SU-30 aircraft, the government had also received offers from the United States to buy the Super Hornet aircraft, he said.

The defence cooperation between Malaysia and Russia in upgrading weaponry for the Malaysian Armed Forces began in 1994 with the purchase of 18 MIG29 aircraft.

Najib said the government had decided to buy the Igla type shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles.

The purchase contract worth about US\$50 million (RM190 million) was expected to be signed soon, he said.

Negotiations were also on-going for the purchase of 10 units of MI-17 utility helicopters from Russia for the needs of the Army Air Corps.

The helicopters which were expected to be acquired soon would terminate the role of the Nuri helicopters which were presently in use, he said.

"We have to upgrade the capability of the Malaysian Armed Forces from time to time so that we do not lag behind in terms of equipment," he said.

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