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Najib-Defence

M'SIA DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE U.S. ARMS DEALERS, SAYS NAJIB

PETALING JAYA, July 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia does not discriminate U.S. arms dealers although its armed forces sources its defence requirements from countries of the former Communist bloc, said Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today.

He said it had nothing to do also with frequent criticisms of the U.S. of Malaysia's political views or the seemingly harsh stand of the U.S. towards Muslims after the Sept 11 attacks.

"Our policy on procurement is global and not ideological. We buy from any country if it suits our requirements," he told reporters after officiating the sixth Tun Razak Lecture seminar here.

Najib was asked to comment on concern by U.S. arms companies that the current prejudice towards Islam by the U.S. media and congress could jeopardise their arms markets.

The two-day seminar is attended by 120 academicians from Malaysia and the U.S.

Najib said the Sept 11 attacks by terrorists in the U.S. also did not affect military cooperation between the two countries.

He said it had however slightly affected cooperation in the field of education as the U.S. tightened up measures to screen foreign nationals.

Malaysia adopted an open policy in arms procurement as reflected in the arsenal of Malaysian Armed Forces, which was sourced from various countries such as Russia, United Kingdom, U.S and others, he said.

The U.S. was the No.1 supplier of arms to Malaysia in the 70s and 80s with its M-16 rifles, F-5E fighters, A4 Skyhawk fighters and Skorsky (Nuri) helicopters until the Russia broke the monopoly with its MiG-29 in the 90s.

"So, it (the procurement policy) is not due to any pressure from anybody because Malaysia is an independent country and we can make any decision which we feel is in the interest of the country," he said.

Najib was also asked on the kind of weapons Malaysia was interested in getting from Ukraine following Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to that country early this month.

"It is too early to say," he said, adding that sophisticated weapons required careful assessment.

"That is why we have to send a technical team to Ukraine before making any decision," he said.

Dr Mahathir had during the visit expressed Malaysia's interest in buying air defence system from Ukraine, a country very advance in aerospace technology.

Najib also said he was confident that Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would continue to ensure political and economic stability when he takes over the country's leadership.

He said he had always given full support to Abdullah who would succeed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after his retirement in October.

Najib, who is also Umno Vice-President, urged Umno members to give undivided support to Abdullah to put a stop to speculations of "political threat" to the positions of certain people after Abdullah takes over the leadership.

"Such assumptions have to be stopped to ensure a smooth transition of power in the country," he said.

Najib also congratulated Army Field Commander Lt-Jen Datuk Pahlawan

Khairuddin Mat Yusoh on his appointment as the next commander of the UN peacekeeping forces in East Timor effective Sept 1.

Khairuddin will replace Singaporean Major-Gen Tan Huck Gim who finishes his one-year tour of duty at the end of August.

Najib said the appointment announcement by the United Nations was a big and significant honour to Malaysia as it could bolster the country's image.

He said his appointment proved that the Malaysian Armed Forces was capable of producing calibre officers.

Khairuddin, 54, is the second army top brass to head a UN peacekeeping mission after Jen Datuk Aboo Samah Aboo Bakar who headed a similar force in Somalia.

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