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Mahathir-Defence

MALAYSIA STUDYING POSSIBILITY OF SOURCING DEFENCE NEEDS FROM UKRAINE

By: Mohd Kamel Othman

KIEV, Ukraine, July 14 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia is studying very closely the possibility of sourcing some of its defence needs from Ukraine especially in air defence capability.

"We are aware that you have got lot of defence capability and technology knowhow in the defence industry," he said at a joint media conference with Ukrainian President Leonid D.Kuchma at the Mariinsky Palace here where both leaders led their delegations for a bilateral meeting.

Saying that he had been briefed and shown demonstration of Ukraine's air defence capability, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia could learn a lot from Ukraine in terms of defence.

Asked whether any agreement was reached at the meeting, Dr Mahathir said: "We have not actually made any concrete agreements but it is quite obvious there is complementary of areas between Malaysia and Ukraine that can be worked out especially in the industrial field."

The Prime Minister cited an example where Malaysia was focusing on IT and multimedia where else Ukraine had a lot of technology with regards to defence and other equipment.

Meanwhile, Kuchma said that apart from being a very influential player in the region, Malaysia had tremendous economic potential which Ukraine should look at.

He said that Ukraine had a very well developed military industry and during the Soviet era, 40 per cent of its industry was the defence industry which included aerospace industry, ship-building, construction of tanks and electronic warfare.

"We offer reliable equipment and the price is competitive," he said.

Kuchma also said that his government would remove the visa requirements for diplomats and businessmen and to simplify the visa requirements for tourists to further boost relationship between Malaysia and the Ukraine.

On Malaysian students studying in Ukraine, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia hoped to increase the number of students studying in Ukrainian universities.

Currently, there are about 500 Malaysian students in Ukraine, mainly in the field of medicine.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were given a ceremonial welcome at the Mariinskyi Palace where they were greeted by Kuchma.

The Prime Minister, who is on a four-day official visit, then inspected a guard of honour before proceeding for bilateral talks.

Dr Mahathir is the first Malaysian Prime Minister to travel to the former Soviet republic since diplomatic relations were established between both countries in March 1991.

Ukraine, situated in the south-eastern part of Central Europe, is the biggest east European country after Russia covering over 600,000 square kilometres.

It is richly endowed in natural resources and one of the world's main centres of sugar production, producing both for her own needs and export.

It borders the Black Sea, Belarus, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovakia.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah attended an official banquet hosted by Kuchma at the palace tonight.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir will leave for Odessa, south-central Ukraine, the chief trade and fishing port of the country.

He will witness joint venture signing ceremonies between JM Ventures Sdn Bhd and Odessa Port Transshipment Complex LLC, technical collaboration between Yasmin Marine Technology Sdn Bhd and Ukraine state companies and between AMP Corporation (M) Sdn Bhd and Iskra-State Electro Machine Building Plant.

Dr Mahathir will also be briefed on the set-up of the Malaysia Trade Centre, and make a tour of Odessa Port and the palm oil storage facilities before leaving for Simferopol, south of Odessa and the administrative, economic and cultural centre located on the banks of Salgir River.

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