

**Malaysia Will Strengthen Intelligence With France To Curb IS Threat**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and France have agreed to cooperate in strengthening intelligence sharing to counter the growing threat of IS (Islamic State) militant group, especially in Sulu Waters.

Defense Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein pointed out that the expertise and experience that France had in dealing with maritime issue, could come as a benefit in this case.

"Thus, it is important to have a friend like France to navigate Sulu water together," he told a press conference after a four-eyed meeting with his French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian at Wisma Pertahanan, here today.

Le Drian and French defence industry representatives had earlier met with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the prime minister's office in Perdana Putra, Putrajaya.

In the same development, Hishammuddin pointed out that there was a growing interest in the Sulu Waters, now that the terrorist group of Abu Sayyaf which is believed to be based in the Philippines had declared allegiance to the IS.

"The Sulu Waters must be secured in the event that there should be irresponsible groups (in this case Abu Sayyaf) that look over the waters as Islamic caliphate," he said.

In this regard, Hishammuddin said Malaysia considers France as a close European partner in defense and hoped that it will lead to mutual benefits for both nations.

Concurring with the views, Le Drian said maritime issues like piracy and terrorism, must to be taken as a responsibility for both countries.

"IS threats are among the biggest threats and have been alarming nationwide," he said.

In another development, commenting on the acquisition of military assets, Hishammuddin said the ministry would review the proposal involving the Multi Role Combat Aircraft supplied by the French Dassault Aviation Rafale.

"We will see our financial capability by submitting the proposal to the Ministry of Finance whether we will buy it or not," he said.

In March 2013, Malaysia shortlisted five fighter jets, namely, Eurofighter Typhoon built by the European consortium comprising BAE Systems, EADS and Finmeccanica; Dassault Aviation Rafale; Boeing's F/A 18E/F Super Hornet; Russian made Sukhoi Su-30 and Swedish made SAAB JAS-39 Gripen.

Asked on the purchase of Mistral helicopter carrier, Hishammuddin said it however was not discussed at the meeting.

The discussion on the Mistral was voiced out earlier in the meeting with Najib.

The French Tribune newspaper recently suggested that Malaysia was also a possible contender for the purchase of one of the Mistral aircraft carriers which had been ordered by Russia from STX France before being cancelled after the Ukrainian standoff in 2014.

According to the French newspaper La Tribune, Malaysia had been interested in buying an aircraft carrier similar to a Mistral for at least 10 years.

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