

Malaysia in the market for new military hardware

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■ From Shahrizan Johari in London

MALAYSIA plans to buy two new warships and eight trainer aircraft to beef up its military capability.

The Government has issued a letter of intent to Britain's BAE Systems for the two frigates while talks on the training fighters with Italy's Aermacchi are in the preliminary stage.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is on a one-week working visit to Britain, including attending the Farnborough International Airshow, said Malaysia was also in the market for search and rescue aircraft.

Also on its shopping list are attack helicopters and aircraft for maritime surveillance.

The ships were likely to be built in Labuan, he told Malaysian reporters at a briefing here yesterday.

He declined to say how much the additional military hardware would cost.

"We can't just look at the cost, we have to look at the impact on the economy because the ships will be built in Malaysia," Najib said.

Small and medium-sized companies can benefit from the project as it will create new jobs.

Construction of the new warships will take up to five years.

"These will be the most advanced warships to be constructed in Malaysia."

The new ships will double the number of frigates to four. The navy now has the *Lekiu* and *Jebat*. It needs four to make it a viable number to operate a fleet.



Najib at the Farnborough International Airshow yesterday. — Bernama picture

As for the Aermacchi trainer aircraft, Najib said, it was needed to help pilots prepare for the arrival of the Russian Sukhoi jet fighters that Malaysia was buying.

"When the Sukhois arrive, we need a group of pilots who are highly-skilled."

When asked whether he would be visiting the site for the proposed sports training centre in

Brickendonbury, he said: "No, I'm not going there."

Plans to build the centre has drawn flak from several quarters.

"The details, scope and budget have not been approved.

"We have only approved its concept but the Youth and Sports Ministry needs to make a concrete proposal for the Government."

Najib also met Lord Paul Drayson, the Minister for Defence

Procurement, and Alan Garwood, the head of Defence Exports Services Organisation.

He had asked Drayson to share Britain's experience in Private Finance Initiative, a new way of funding projects that was being introduced by the Malaysian Government.

"In Britain's context, it is used widely and has given good returns to them," Najib added.