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RMN submariners awarded medals by French Navy

YESTERDAY was a proud day for two Royal Malaysian Navy officers who underwent operational training on board the French Navy's Agosta-class La Praya submarine.

In the presence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Lt Baharuddin Wan Md Nor and Lt Madya Kamarulzaman Zainul Akmar were awarded the upper submarine certificate medals by Admiral Hubert Foillard, the Flag Officer of the French Navy's submarine fleet.

They are the first RMN and foreign navy officers to be so decorated by the French Navy. It signifies their qualification to operate submarines.

Baharuddin is attached to RMN headquarters, and Kamarulzaman to the KD Serampang patrol craft based in Lumut.

Both officers had two months training at the French Navy submarine fleet's Mediterranean Command base headquarters in Toulon from October. It ended with a two-week voyage on La Praya.

They arrived here with the submarine on Sunday from Goa, India. The certification also puts them among the core group of RMN personnel trained and qualified in submarine operations.

The RMN has for the past 10 years sent officers to Turkey, the UK, Australia, Sweden and France for submarine familiarisation training.

This is in anticipation of the Government acquiring submarines for the RMN.

Both officers said they were honoured by the award.

"It is an honour to the country and the RMN, and it is significant to us that the Prime Minister witnessed the event," said Baharuddin.

On their training and voyage, Baharuddin said it was a new experience as submarine operations were totally different from surface vessels.

He said it required a high degree of professionalism from every crew member.

"There must be a high level of esprit de corps and we need to support each other closely," he added.

He said although living in a submarine "was like staying in a tin can", it was exciting.

Baharuddin and Kamarulzaman were picked by the RMN Headquarters after going through strict processing procedures including interviews and physical examinations.

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