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11 new copters for armed forces

MALACCA, Sun. - The Defence Ministry will acquire 11 Fennec helicopters, worth about RM200 million, in an effort to upgrade and modernise the armed forces.

The helicopters, manufactured by France-based company Eurocopter, will be acquired for the Army Air Corps.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the procurement of the helicopters would be carried out in stages under the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

"The helicopter is similar to the one procured by the Government for the Royal Malaysian Air Force recently," he said yesterday.

Prior to the procurement, the Army Air Corps has been using the Alloutte III helicopters which were seconded to the corps by the RMAF.

There had been rumours the Defence Ministry was looking to equip the corps with the South African-made Rooivalk attack helicopters.

Najib said the Ministry was preparing the paperwork on the exact cost for the procurement of the helicopters and their delivery schedule.

He said the procurement exercise might take sometime as a series of evaluation would have to be carried out.

"The exact cost for the purchase will depend on the technical specifications or sub-systems that we choose.

"What I can say is that we need about RM200 million for the purchase, maybe slightly more."

Najib said a special department would be set up to look into the needs and welfare of the former army elite.

He added the department would be led by former Army Headquarters Training chief Mej Jen (rtd) Amir Baharuddin.

"This is in recognition of all the sacrifices and contributions made by the Special Forces over the years.

"Their turnout today also clearly show their commitment towards the regiment," he said when addressing a gathering of former Special Forces commandoes at the Sungai Udang camp yesterday, which was attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir was on a four-hour visit to the camp where he was presented with the Special Forces' Green Beret for his contributions and sacrifices to the country and the regiment.

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