

**Najib urged to slash 'wasteful' military spending**  
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**By Nicholas Wong**

The coalition of Concerned Malaysian NGOs led by Suaram has appealed to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to cut Malaysia's defence spending and review its defence policy as well.

NONEThe coalition submitted a memorandum outlining their demands to the prime minister's assistant private secretary S Azhar at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya this morning.

Najib was not available for the coalition's appointment.

The four demands of the coalition are:

- \* Cut the defence budget to below one percent of the GDP and apportion a correspondingly higher budget for health, education and social services.
- \* Set up a parliamentary defence committee co-chaired by an opposition MP as well as an independent ombudsman to oversee the defence budget.
- \* Review the national defence policy to promote a culture of peace and disarmament.
- \* Promote Asean cooperation in order to pool resources and slash arms spending in the region.

The group's main demand is for the national defence budget to be slashed from two to three percent of the GDP to under one percent.

The country has spent as much as RM14.7 billion on defence in 2008 while the total security allocation under the 10th Malaysia Plan is RM23 billion.

The security allocation has been as high as 15.9 percent of GDP under the Third Malaysia Plan while allocations for health care have been as low as 1.6 percent and 1.0 percent under the Fourth and Fifth Malaysia Plans, respectively.

NONESuaram director Kua Kia Soong (right) criticised the government's wasteful spending on arms and instead called for spending on health care, education and social services to be increased.

"The education minister said recently that 600 schools in the country are in critical condition.

"Malaysia's food import bill totalled RM27 billion in 2008.

"Yet, the allocation for defence in the country remains high when the money could be spent on improving schools or producing food.

"We want food, not bombs. We want schools, not Scorpene submarines," he said, adding that need for defence spending is overrated.

Citing the government's RM9 billion purchase of two Scorpene submarines as an example, Kua said that 10 such submarines would be required to patrol the South China Sea.

A more effective approach would be passive defence measures such as anti-tank or anti-aircraft systems, he added.

He blamed the “top brass of the military” and the “simple justification of national security” as being factors behind the country’s high expenditure on defence.

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