

**No Need To Involve Opposition In Purchase Of Military Assets - Zahid
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LANGKAWI, Dec 5 (Bernama) - Defence Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi is confident in the ability and transparency of the evaluation committee of the three branches of the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM) and thus don't need to involve the opposition in the purchase of national defence assets.

He said under the defence purchase acquisition system developed by the Ministry of Finance, products being considered are assessed by a committee in the army, air force and navy.

"If the assets are required by the army (for example), the army committee will make assessment to determine the specifications," he told reporters on board KD Jebat anchored at Awana Porto Malai jetty for Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima 2011), here Monday.

Assessment is not only made from the technical point but also transfer of technology and benefits to be earned over the long term, especially to the local defence industry.

Zahid said Malaysia's defence industry has gained a lot from the purchase of defence assets by ATM in the past, such as jet fighter aircraft and warships.

"We received technology transfer, especially in the manufacturing of composite materials via two companies, Composite Technology Research Malaysia (CTRM) and SME Aerospace."

It was not limited only to composite materials manufacturing technology as some companies were entrusted by foreign companies to carry out MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) work, such as Airod and Zetro.

On another note, Zahid said the final decision on the proposed purchase of multi-role combat aircraft (MRCA) would be made by the government, and "not by the defence minister".

"At the moment we're retaining our MIG-29, but at the same time we're looking for a new squadron of MRCA," he said.

ATM was reported to be assessing five types of MRCA namely Eurofighter Typhoon of Britain, Saab Gripen of Sweden, Sukhoi Su-30 of Russia, F-18 Super Hornet of United States and Dassault Rafale of France.

"In assessing MRCA, the most important aspects are technical, pricing, technology transfer and benefits it will bring to the country, he added.

Foreign journalists are linking the proposed acquisition of MRCA two Scorpene submarines as preparation to face China which are involved in overlapping claims to the Spratly islands with several regional countries.

Refuting this, Zahid said the proposed purchase of MRCA was to replace the MIG-29 while the purchase of submarines was planned long before the Spratlys issue erupted.

The minister also said invitation letters were sent to opposition leaders to board the submarine KD Tun Abdul Razak but received no response from them.

Lima 2011 will start from tomorrow until Dec 10.

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