

**National Defence Asset Procurement Does Not Exceed Ceiling Set - Zahid
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 1 (Bernama) -- The cost of procuring assets for the national defence inventory will not exceed the ceiling set by the government, said Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Hence, he said irregularities in the procurement process would not occur unless the foreign exchange rates in which the purchase was made fluctuated besides other associated factors.

"The ceiling price was set in the budget and all assets purchased, including littoral combat ships (LCS), usually will not exceed the ceiling price unless foreign currencies appreciated.

"The cost may also escalate if changes are made to the specifications of the assets. However, it may be said that prices of all assets usually meet the ceiling set," he told reporters after seeing off the departure of 16,885 National Service (NS) trainees of Group 1 Series 9/2012 at Wangsa Maju here.

He was commenting on Member of Parliament for Petaling Jaya Utara Tony Pua's claim that the price for the Second Generation Patrol Vessels - LCS had gone up by billions of ringgit shortly after the tender to build the six vessels was awarded to Boustead Naval Shipyard.

Ahmad Zahid also denied that fraud had occurred in the purchase of defence assets, including LCS, and he was prepared to answer any question and allegation raised if Tony Pua was brave enough to face him at the Ministry of Defence.

He also challenged Pua or any party, who has evidence of irregularities in the procurement of national defence assets, to report it to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) by furnishing documents as evidence.

"I had invited Pua to join a submarine ride during the last Langkawi International Maritime and Air Exhibition (LIMA '11) but he turned it down. I suppose he only dared to crow and become a hero behind the curtain.

"When I answered his question in Parliament, he was not present to hear my reply, but continued to harp on the matter in political ceramah. He is brave only before the opposition crowd but chicken out when asked for a face-to-face meeting," said Ahmad Zahid.

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