

Stop touching on defence issues, Opposition cautioned

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MALACCA: The Defence Ministry has cautioned Opposition leaders to draw a line between politics and national security, especially when touching on issues relating to national defence assets.

Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said Opposition leaders were fond of emphasising matters connected to the nation's defence assets.

"Matters concerning the nation's defence strategies or assets should not be made into *ceramah* material.

"It could be a risk to our national security when Opposition leaders twist facts about defence assets in a bid to gain political mileage," he said after officially handing over decommissioned Royal Malaysian Navy training submarine, *SMD Quessant* to Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam at 1Malaysia Square, in Klebang here, yesterday.

The Malacca Government will be converting the decommissioned submarine into a museum.

Dr Ahmad Zahid said the Government classified documents pertaining to the procurement of military arsenal and defence assets as military secrets to defuse any threat to national security.

He added that the move was also to prevent information on the nation's defence assets from slipping out to external parties.

Dr Ahmad Zahid also reminded Opposition leaders not to drag senior Armed Forces officials into their political affairs.

"High-ranking military officers are apolitical and would certainly feel slighted if the Opposition attempts to rope them into their political agenda. Hence, I would like to caution these quarters from linking them to preposterous and unsubstantiated issues," he said.

He also said some of the facts about the national defence assets brought up by the Opposition were unfounded and could confuse the rakyat.

"The Opposition claims we are spending exorbitantly to enhance our military arsenal without realising that all expenditure for such purpose is prudently planned," he added.

The handing-over ceremony of the French-made *SMD Quessant* (Agosta 70class) was also witnessed by Navy Chief Admiral Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Jaafar and French Ambassador to Malaysia Martine Dorence.

The submarine was used for training the first Malaysian submarine crew from 2005 to 2009 following the acquisition of two French Scorpene submarines in 2002.

Mohd Ali Rustam said the submarine museum project costing RM12.6mil was expected to draw more tourists.

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