

Defence Ministry briefs opposition MPs on navy deal
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S Pathmawathy

The Defence Ministry today explained that the cost of Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) had increased by RM3 billion from RM6 billion because this was the actual total amount quoted for the construction of the ships by Boustead Naval Shipyard, but spread out over two Malaysia Plans.

The ministry had invited opposition MPs and representatives of the BN Backbenchers Club for a briefing by the Royal Malaysia Navy and the ministry's secretary-general Ismail Ahmad at the ministry today.

patrol vessel progress of construction 110907According to Machang PKR parliamentarian Saifuddin Nasution, "The confusion was because the minister's explanation (in Parliament) did not state that it was spread over the two Malaysia Plans."

"The secretary-general said that the RM3 billion was also for the ships' construction but slotted under the 11th MP, and this was also explained in letter of intent by the ministry to Boustead," Saifuddin told reporters.

"We are not privy to the contents of the letter of intent but the nitty-gritty details have yet to be finalised," he added.

The issue was raised during the debate on the 10th Malaysia Plan (10MP) in Parliament, when Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi stated that RM6 billion was allocated for the LCS.

This was however countered by the opposition when Boustead in its statement to Bursa Malaysia quoted a ceiling price of RM9 billion for six LCS units.

NONThe funds for the 10MP were allocated for a period of five years, from 2011 to 2015.

Petaling Jaya Utara DAP MP Tony Pua (left) then said that six ships cost 870 percent more compared to similar purchases by other countries, and demanded that the minister explain the stark difference.

Asked if they were given a breakdown of how the RM9 billion purchase came about, Pua said that the ministry officials did not state the specifics.

"They gave a 30-minute presentation and 90-minutes for questions and answers," said Pua.

"I leave it up to you to decide," he said when asked if the opposition is satisfied.

Kuala Selangor PAS MP Dzulkefly Ahmad added that such forums should be encouraged as it gives the federal opposition a chance to clarify matters.

"When Bernama reported in February 2011 that the ceiling was RM6 billion and in December it reported RM9 billion, we raised the matter so that the government would be held responsible.

'Parliamentary oversight committee idea not rejected'

"Today, we proposed a parliamentary oversight committee, and the idea was not rejected.

"They (the government) said they will consider the proposal and the BN Backbenchers Club also gave positive signals, the ministry added that they will leave it to Parliament to decide," he said.

Dzulkefly hoped that the “practice of checks and balances” will be strengthened following the engagement.

Malaysiakini as well as reporters from other online news portal were barred from attending the media conference hosted by the government earlier by ministry officials.

The ministry’s public relation officer Haslinda Rahim said, “Sorry, opposition media are not allowed in. Only mainstream media”.

NONEKota Belud Umno MP Abdul Rahman Dahlan (right), who approached reporters standing outside, said that everyone was satisfied with the explanations provided.

“I quote ‘crystal clear’, those were the words used by Saifuddin. The opposition should be more responsible. There’s nothing wrong with asking questions, but there is a very fine line between asking questions and making innuendos, and they should now stop it,” he reminded.

He stressed that any procurement “as big as this” has to be spread out over the years.

Abdul Rahman defended that there were no discrepancies in Zahid’s responses in Parliament, adding that the opposition should study the matter in detail before blowing up the issue.

Commenting on the mooted of a parliamentary oversight committee, Abdul Rahman said, “It was a step forward”.

“In principle, we don’t have any problems with it, but we want to know the parameters. There are things in the Defence Ministry, especially when intelligence and procurement of military equipment are concerned.

“But these matters are quite difficult for people to understand until they are in the government,” he said.

Also with him during the forum were Umno MPs Khairy Jamaluddin (Rembau), Ahmad Hamzah (Jasin) and Bung Moktar Radin (Kinabatangan), as well as MIC MP P Kamalanathan (Kuala Selangor).

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