

Suaram lawyers get access to French court papers
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By Susan Loone

The civil suit against French naval defence giant DCNS filed by human rights group Suaram for allegedly paying kickbacks to top Malaysian officials is gaining momentum.

On Thursday, Suaram' lawyers in France, informed the NGO that they had obtained access to court papers related to the case involving the RM7.73 billion purchase of two scorpene submarines.

NONE Suaram director Cynthia Gabriel (left) said that the lawyers would be able to study the documents and advise the NGO accordingly on the course of action to adopt.

"However, we cannot display the documents. We can access it, study it and make references to it, but we cannot publicise it according to French law," she told Malaysiakini.

"This is indeed a big challenge for us but we are pleased that the case is taking form and moving in the right direction and momentum," she added.

Two judges already appointed

Gabriel was referring to Suaram's two-year wait for the case to finally open in court, after the latter filed it in 2009.

Two weeks ago, Suaram had announced that two judges had been appointed to oversee the case in France - Roger Le Loire and Serge Tournaire - which meant that the case would finally be scheduled for open court hearing.

The court documents include further details of the commissions paid out, travel invoices and other payments made in the course of the procurement process of the subs.

altantuya and son 050309Mongolian national Altantuya Shaariibuu (right) gruesome murder in 2006, although not directly tied to the complaint filed, is said to be intricately linked with the alleged payments and kickbacks made.

The two subs were purchased by the Malaysian government when Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was defence minister, the latter has denied any involvement in the scandal.

Perimekar, an obscure company linked to Najib's close ally - Abdul Razak Baginda - was paid 114 million euros, or RM570 million, for acting as a go-between in the controversial deal.

Abdul Razak and two of Najib's bodyguards were charged with murdering the Mongolian; he was acquitted without his defence being called.

Bodyguards' appeal in August

The other two were found guilty and sentenced to death but are appealing their conviction which will be heard in court in August.

The government has justified that the huge payment made to Perimekar was for its "coordination and support" services.

NONE Defence minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (left) has agreed to testify in court should he be called to do

so.

Meanwhile, Gabriel said one of Suaram's lawyers in France - William Bourdon or Joseph Brehem - may make a trip to Malaysia to explain in further detail the development of the case.

"We need to discuss what kind of information can be released and what should be kept until later," she added.

"However, we need to study the situation first. If they can't make it here, we (Suaram) will meet them at another location to be decided later," she stressed.

Bourdon was deported from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport last year, after attending a fund-raising dinner in Penang.

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