

Direct awards: Did Harapan violate its promise?

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PARLIAMENT | The exchange over government contracts awarded without open tender has continued into its third day, with arguments now being shifted towards whether or not Pakatan Harapan violated its promise.

Deputy Finance Minister Abdul Rahim Bakri (Harapan-Kudat) told Parliament this morning that the RM6.61 billion contracts awarded by the Harapan government were not a problem.

Rather, Abdul Rahim alleged that the issue at hand was that Harapan had allegedly promised in its election manifesto not to give project contracts via direct negotiation.

He said this when responding to a question from Saifuddin Nasution Ismail (Harapan-Kulim Bandar Bharu).

Item 23 of the Harapan manifesto, or Buku Harapan, outlined policies which the

coalition would undertake on government procurement.

Among others, the document read: "To ensure that every sen of taxpayer's money is spent well, the Harapan government will reform the public procurement system and the way contracts are awarded.

"This is to ensure that it is more competitive and will generate the best value for taxpayer's money. We will ensure that the open tendering (process) is used extensively and transparently, particularly for large projects."

At a press conference in the Parliament lobby today, former finance minister Lim Guan Eng took pains to explain that this promise was not violated.

"In other words, (our promise was that) open tender was the basis for procurement but in some situations, there can be exceptions.

"That is why direct awards amounting to RM6.61 billion was only 1.4 percent of the total procurement during the Harapan administration," he said.

The Bagan MP said directly awarded contracts were necessary for emergencies or procurements involving national security.

"(Government rules permit) direct awards for situations such as floods or the Covid-19 pandemic to allow for swift action.

"It can also be used for sole suppliers of a product or service, such as 'Microsoft Word Office', where there could not be an open tender," Lim added.

So far, Putrajaya has refused to heed calls to reveal details of the 101 projects in question, which Harapan politicians claim will reveal that some current cabinet ministers were responsible for handing out the contract awards.

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