

## **'Why is gov't hiding defence procurement figures?'**

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Pakatan Rakyat senators questioned government secrecy on details of defence procurement contracts, saying incomplete replies and outright rejection of questions from the opposition in Parliament is proof that the government is not transparent and indiscriminately misusing the "official secret" label to hide inconvenient truths.

NONE Speaking at a press conference in the Dewan Negara lobby this morning, DAP senator Tunku Abdul Aziz Ibrahim lamented the government's frequent excuse that defence procurements are classified as "secret".

"We don't want to know military secrets. What we want to know is simply the procedure of awarding defence procurement contracts.

"More importantly this involves government money, public money. We need to know how it is spent," Tunku Abdul Aziz said.

He was referring to, among others, a Defence Ministry written answer to Parti Keadilan Rakyat senator Syed Husin Ali today to his call yesterday that the ministry disclose the names of companies awarded defence contracts and the value of the contract awarded to each company.

azlan In the written answer, the ministry named 29 firms that were awarded defence procurement contracts, 15 local and 14 foreign, but was silent on the contract values.

Syed Husin, who was also present at the press conference, said, "I urge the ministry to reveal the actual amounts. And if it can't, then it should explain why."

The companies listed as defence contractors to the nation's armed forces included Airod Sdn Bhd, Boustead Naval Shipyard Sdn Bhd, Aviation Holding Company Sukhoi, Sarawak Shipyard Sdn Bhd and Geliga Slipway Sdn Bhd.

Prominent among the companies is Boustead-DCNS Naval Corporation Sdn Bhd, which has been tentatively awarded the contract to maintain the pair of Scorpene submarines, the purchase of which made headlines over alleged connection with the murder of Mongolian model and businesswoman Altantuya Shaaribuu.

The sale of the submarines to Malaysia by French firm DCNS has also been linked to cases of kickbacks and corruption currently being investigated by the French authorities.

"The unappealing attitude towards questions in the Parliament is worrying, and somewhat signals bad transparency on the part of the government," said Syed Husin, who is PKR deputy president.

Government 'less than cooperative'

NONE The opposition has continued to press the government on defence contracts amidst widespread allegations of corruption and waste of public funds, but the government has been less than cooperative, citing that the relevant information as "official secret" and a matter of national security that cannot be discussed.

However, undeterred by the information blackout over defence procurements, the opposition senators vowed to continue their crusade to disclose what they believe is a matter of public interest.

"We are going to research who is really behind these companies," said Syed Husin, indicating that the opposition senators would not stop asking questions.

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