

**PR Ready To Accept Zahid's Defence Clarifications Invite**  
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**by Tony Pua**

The Defence Minister, Zahid Hamidi has said yesterday that he was willing to meet up with me to explain and clarify the purchase of the six second generation patrol vessels or "littoral combatant ships (frigate class)" (LCS). The issue surfaced again since the price tag for the war ships has increased from RM6 billion announced on 5 February this year, but has since increased 50% to RM9 billion this month.

Boustead Holdings Bhd has announced on Bursa Malaysia that its subsidiary Boustead Naval Shipyard Sdn Bhd has received the "letter of award to undertake the construction of the ships" from Ministry of Defence Malaysia "to design, construct, equip, install, commission, integrate, test and trials, and deliver six LCS" for the new ceiling price of RM 9.0 billion

We have asked for the Defence Minister to explain the drastic increase, especially since even the initial RM6 billion price tag had already attracted controversy and required Zahid to provide an explanation in parliament.

In defending the RM6 billion deal in parliament, the Minister had claimed that these patrol vessels were no ordinary ships but were advanced warships known as "littoral combatant ships" (LCS).

Zahid had in March claimed that the LCS is "bigger and faster" and "it is also equipped with three-dimensional warfare equipment like cannons, missiles and torpedoes" which are able to take on jets, ships and submarines respectively.

He argued that "with the rapid development of technology, the RMN would need an LCS with state-of-the-art equipment like the sonar system for submarine detection and anti-submarine torpedoes, which would help in the operation of the two RMN submarines to safeguard the sovereignty of national maritime areas."

Since the RM6 billion price tag has already come with all the above "advanced" technologies to fight jets, ships and submarines, what else has the Ministry of Defence ordered to justify the additional allocation of RM3 billion? The price-tag of RM1.5 billion will certainly make our patrol vessels among the most expensive in the world.

Instead of providing an open explanation to the public, Zahid had mocked me yesterday asking "Where does he get his figures? From Kua Kia Soong, the former DAP MP?" If he has bothered reading my statements, I've stated clearly that the figures came from the announcements made by Boustead as well as "authoritative" answers made by himself in the Parliament. The Minister will perhaps do well to stop relying on Papagomo as his chief intelligence advisor, who has to date provided the former with only half-truths and fictitious data.

Pakatan Rakyat MPs, including Nurul Izzah Anwar and Dr Dzulkefli Ahmad are more than willing to take up the offer from the Minister to seek his clarification. However, he should not only provide clarifications for the above purchase involving RM9 billion but also the other mega-acquisition of 257 armoured personnel vehicles (APVs) costing RM7.55 billion this year. In his parliamentary reply to me on the APVs, he had claimed "no knowledge" over the details of the cost.

The Minister must also answer, given his assurance that his Ministry is "open to transparency", why the Government is unwilling to set up a Parliament Oversight Committee to review and monitor defence expenditure. If the Ministry is not even willing to subject himself to oversight by the Parliament, the country's highest legislative body, then Zahid Hamidi has no right to talk about "transparency".

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