

Zahid offers to meet Pakatan MPs over arms buys
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 29 — Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi is offering to meet with Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers and explain the the country's defence procurements, in a bid to allay their suspicions over the multi-billion deals.

"Opposition leaders should provide proof before making accusations. What gave them the impression that the price of LCS has increased?" the defence minister was quoted as saying by Bernama Online today.

On December 18, PR parliamentarians demanded an explanation for the defence ministry's purchase of six littoral class patrol ships for a whopping RM9 billion — an increase of RM3 billion from the original RM6 billion approved earlier this year.

According to the Bernama Online report today, Zahid said the swelling in the price from shipbuilder Boustead Naval Shipyard Sdn Bhd was because the vessels would be built locally.

"The price includes value added such as offset programmes, transfer of technology, and moreover, it does not include the price of sub-systems for each LCS," he was quoted further in the report.

The Defence Ministry's expenditure has drawn intense interest from PR, which has continually sought explanations for the multi-billion ringgit defence deals involving the ministry.

While the government maintains that such contracts must be classified as a matter of national security, PR has insisted that Malaysians have a right to know how public funds were being spent given the ministry's history of cost overruns.

Anti-graft watchdog Transparency International-Malaysia (TI-M) has also urged the government to stop to using national security as an excuse for the secrecy that ends up hiding graft involving defence contracts, and consider appointing independent monitors for such deals.

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