

Pakatan eyes not needed on defence buys, says Zahid
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LANGKAWI, Dec 5 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) scrutiny was unnecessary in defence deals as an Armed Forces joint committee provides the necessary transparency and evaluation, Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi said today.

“If the assets are required by the army (for example), the army committee will make assessment to determine the specifications,” the defence minister was reported as saying by Bernama Online on the sidelines of the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima 2011).

Zahid went on to add that the final say on the proposed purchase of new combat aircraft would be made by the government, and “not the defence minister”.

“At the moment we’re retaining our MIG-29, but at the same time we’re looking for a new squadron of [multi-role combat aircraft],” Zahid said.

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.

The latest was a query as to why the ministry paid RM7.6 billion for armoured personnel carriers (APC) procured by DRB-Hicom Bhd for only US\$559 million (RM1.7 billion).

A RM6 billion contract for six offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) drew similar attention at the start of the year.

An embarrassing failure by one of the country’s billion-ringgit Scorpene submarines to submerge last year attracted further reservations over the prudence of the country’s defence spending.

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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