

No need for Parliament to probe defence buy, says Zahid
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 1 — Parliament does not have to look into the government's purchase of naval vessels as there were no financial "discrepancies", Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said today.

The Defence minister maintained that the purchase of any defence equipment was in accordance with the ministry's allocated budget.

He said that the RM9 billion ceiling price for the navy's six patrol ships would only be higher than the allocated budget if the currency rate for the purchase were to increase.

"There is no discrepancy, if there is the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) will look into it.

"I say it again, they should just meet me, and not talk about it in ceramahs among their own crowd and supporters," Ahmad Zahid told reporters today, referring to Opposition politicians.

He said that there was no need for a Parliamentary Oversight Committee to look into the arms buy, as suggested by DAP lawmaker Tony Pua.

"We are not like Indonesia, or the Philippines...we practice a Westminster system," added the Umno lawmaker.

Pua has said he is willing to meet with Ahmad Zahid to seek clarification over the increased cost of buying six advanced warships, which the opposition claims is excessive.

But the DAP publicity chief has said the minister should not only explain how the price tag for the littoral combatant ships (LCS) jumped to RM9 billion from RM6 billion but also other "mega acquisitions" as well.

This includes the RM7.6 billion deal for 257 Turkish-made armoured personnel carriers (APC) from DRB-Hicom Bhd, the details of which Zahid (picture) claimed he had no knowledge of.

Pakatan Rakyat has reiterated that Putrajaya must set up a parliamentary oversight committee to review and monitor defence deals in the interest of greater transparency.

Zahid has offered to meet with Pakatan Rakyat (PR) MPs to explain the country's defence procurements in a bid to allay their suspicions over the multi-billion ringgit deals.

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

Transparency International-Malaysia (TI-M) has also urged the government to stop to using national security as an excuse and appoint independent monitors to ensure the opaque

deals did not promote graft.

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