

**Pua slams Zahid for claiming he dodged arms deal debate**  
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**By Yow Hong Chieh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 2 —Tony Pua has called the defence minister “arrogant” and “shockingly forgetful” for claiming the DAP publicity chief has never dared to debate Malaysia’s defence buys.

Datuk Zahid Hamidi said yesterday that Pua preferred to snipe from the sidelines but was unwilling to go toe-to-toe in Parliament over multi-billion ringgit arms deals which the opposition has criticised as bloated.

“When I answered his question in Parliament he was not present to hear my reply, but continued to harp on the matter in political ceramah.

“He is brave only before the opposition crowd but chickens out when asked for a face-to-face meeting,” Zahid was quoted by Bernama as saying.

But Pua (picture) called the claims “utter and complete nonsense”, noting that he was present in Parliament and had even debated Zahid twice in March when the minister was replying to questions about the arms purchases.

He pointed out this included a drawn-out debate on March 21 over the Defence Ministry’s decision to procure six littoral combatant ships (LCS) and 257 armoured personnel carriers, which led Zahid to threaten to sue Pua for defamation.

“Hence, Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi’s allegations that I was not present in Parliament exposed just how forgetful and absent-minded he is.

“Even worse, it shows that our defence minister does not check his facts before making statements,” Pua said in a statement yesterday.

The Petaling Jaya Utara MP also reminded Zahid he had confirmed in March 8 that the ceiling price for the six LCS was set at RM6 billion — a figure the minister repeated on March 21 — and questioned the recent cost increase to RM9 billion.

“All of the above points to the fact that we have a clueless defence minister who is arrogant, forgetful, ill-informed and ignorant,” he said.

“The manner in which budgets are so easily exceeded will only increase the likelihood of realising Datuk Seri Idris Jala’s greatest fear that Malaysia may be bankrupt by 2019.”

Pua reiterated that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) MPs were ready to meet with Zahid to discuss the arms deals, and urged the latter’s office to make the appropriate arrangements.

“His first invite made via the press was on December 29, followed by another on (December) 31, and another yesterday, on January 1 of the new year — all of which were published by Bernama.

"He need not have made so many invites. He had me at 'hello'," he said.

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