

**Ambiga throws down asset declaration gauntlet to Zahid**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Debra Chong**

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 16 — Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi should declare his assets and lead his Barisan Nasional (BN) colleagues in the fight against corruption that he has likened to cancer, Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said today.

"I am delighted to hear the minister say that he is of the view that corruption is like a cancer. I couldn't agree more.

"He can now immediately follow the example of the judiciary and the Penang state government, and declare his assets and call for such a declaration by his colleagues. This is the right time for them to show leadership on the issue of corruption," the Bersih 2.0 chief said in a statement today.

Zahid, who is defence minister, yesterday blasted Ambiga's suggestion to the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) bloc to consider an amnesty for government officials accused of minor corruption.

Ambiga had said PR should pardon those involved in such offences if it wins Putrajaya so the country can move forward quickly after a change in power, but stressed that it did not mean those found guilty of large-scale corruption should be similarly pardoned.

"She should be aware that minor corruption could lead to major corruption. Corruption is like a cancer. We should weed it out irrespective of whether it is committed by 'small fish' or 'big fish,'" Zahid was quoted as saying by Bernama Online yesterday.

Ambiga said Zahid must now lead by example and "he should throw open the doors of his Ministry to the MACC (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission)".

"They must answer all the allegations into their various purchases for example of the Scorpene submarines and patrol boats," she added.

Zahid's defence ministry is no stranger to corruption allegations, and regularly sees its multi-billion defence contracts being queried by PR lawmakers.

Most recently, 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 last year.

The ministry's previous decision to pay RM7.6 billion for armoured personnel carriers (APC) procured by DRB-Hicom Bhd for only US\$559 million (RM1.7 billion) drew similar questions from PR parliamentarians.

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

Today, Ambiga highlighted the experience of Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), saying it too had offered an amnesty previously in order to win the bigger battle against graft by adopting a three-pronged approach of investigation, prevention and education.

She said that, previously, Hong Kong had granted a limited amnesty to the police in view of their resistance to change.

"This idea is not new. Conditions may be placed on this amnesty," she said today.

She added: "In a system where corruption is extensive and has gone on for years, as in Malaysia, some of these measures must be considered, for many obvious reasons. Ultimately it is about allowing the country to move on."

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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