

**BN, PR reps positive on parliamentary oversight for defence deals**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**January 19 , 2012**  
**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 19 — Lawmakers from both sides of the divide signalled their support for a parliamentary committee to oversee defence deals which have been a source of controversy in recent years due to their multi-billion ringgit price tags.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) had proposed the panel in today's meeting with the defence ministry (Mindef) top brass and the idea was "supported in principle" by backbenchers from the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

"The minister (Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi) did not reject the proposal and said he will consider it. Even the BN backbenchers club (BNBBC) gave positive signals," PAS research chief Dzulkefly Ahmad told reporters.

BNBBC vice chief Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan confirmed that the five BN MPs who attended the meeting today "felt it is a step forward."

"In principle we have no problems but we just need to know the parameters and terms of reference," the Kota Belud MP said.

DAP publicity chief Tony Pua added that the "biggest achievement today was that the suggestion was not rejected."

"The minister said if parliament decides to set it up, then Mindef will comply," the Petaling Jaya Utara MP said.

PKR secretary general Datuk Saifuddin Nasution said PR would pursue the matter and engage the BNBBC to table the proposal during the March sitting of Parliament.

The federal opposition has repeatedly accused the government of wanting to keep the facts hidden in over RM16 billion in defence deals over the past three years as well as the controversial RM7 billion Scorpene submarine purchase linked to the murder of Mongolian Altantuya Shariibuu in 2006.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin, who also attended today's meeting, had previously declared support for a Freedom of Information Act (FOI) but stressed last night that several areas needed to be excluded in the interest of national security such as defence procurements.

The Rembau MP mooted an Armed Services committee instead to be formed by lawmakers and the armed forces to hear representations from field experts before discussing policy in secret.

Zahid, chiefs of the airforce, army and navy and Mindef's secretary general were present for today's meeting with the PR and BN lawmakers.

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