

Call naval patrol ships by actual term, Pua tells Putrajaya
The Malaysian Insider
January 21 , 2012
By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21 —The federal government should stop conflating the six naval patrol ships it was buying for RM9 billion with "littoral combat ships" when they are from a lesser category, DAP's Tony Pua insisted today.

The DAP lawmaker said he could now confirm that the government was not acquiring "littoral combat ships (LCS)" as claimed, but another class of naval vehicles called "Gowind Class Corvettes".

Pua, along with Pakatan Rakyat (PR) allies Saifuddin Nasution Ismail and Dzulkefly Ahmad, had met up with top officials from the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) earlier this week to clarify the multi-billion purchase.

"We would now like to call upon Mindef to 'call a spade a spade' and stop the attempt to disguise our acquisition with fancy names to justify their substantial cost," he said in a statement today.

"The Gowind-class corvettes are not ships to be belittled and are powerful in their own ways which may serve the needs of Malaysian navy, but they are not by means the equivalent of LCS as trumpeted by the minister and the government," he added.

The DAP publicity chief has been sparring with Defence Minister Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi in and out of Parliament over the hike in costs for the six vessels after this was revealed to have ballooned from an initial RM6 billion to a whopping RM9 billion.

He pointed out that the LCS is a specific type of ship built to a specific length, speed and design by the US navy and no other country. He added that the US' currently had only two such vessels in service and was building others.

The Petaling Jaya Utara MP noted Mindef officials said the top speed for Malaysia's patrol ships could only reach 28 knots, which was lower than the 40 to 45 knots of the standard LCS.

The six ships were also to be shorter, measuring 105m long, and would not have the long-range transit reach of 3,500 miles (5,600km).

Mindef officials also said each ship can carry only one Eurocopter 725 onboard and would not have the capability to launch and recover small boats.

Pua said Mindef officials had also confirmed during the meeting that Malaysia's defence patrol ships, contracted to Boustead Naval Shipyards, would be built by what he referred to as "scandal-tainted French shipbuilder DCNS".

"It will certainly be a stretch of any military expert's imagination to equate our purchase of these SPGV Corvettes to the state-of-the-art LCS," Pua said.

Pua had previously urged Zahid to explain how the price tag for the LCS jumped to RM9 billion from RM6 billion, and why the Turkish-made APCs were purchased from Deftech Sdn Bhd for RM29.4 million each when they had been bought for only RM6.7 million apiece.

He has alleged that the cost of the separate purchases was greatly inflated, and urged the minister to be more transparent about the deals, which were conducted without open tender.

Pua had wanted Putrajaya to set up a parliamentary oversight committee on defence procurement modelled after the US House Oversight Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations and the US Defense Budget Appropriation Committees to review future defence deals.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/call-naval-patrol-ships-by-act-ual-term-pua-tells-putrajaya/>