

Scorpene French filing last chance at truth, says Suaram
The Malaysian Insider
April 23, 2012
By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, April 23 — For rights group Suaram, uncovering the truth is its own reward even though the perpetrators of a crime are not brought to book.

The non-profit organisation formally filed a complaint with a Paris civil court last Thursday over a multimillion Scorpene submarine sale to Putrajaya, despite knowing the French have no power to act on Malaysians outside Europe as it has no mutual legal assistance treaty.

“We are aware that the government may evade the court process, however we believe that there is a still possibility for us to uncover the truth as there are other witnesses who will come forward to testify,” said Fadiyah Nadwa Fikri.

File photo of a yellow submarine cake which was auctioned during a Scorpene fundraising dinner in Petaling Jaya last year.

The lawyer is one of three Suaram activists who had travelled thousands of kilometres West last week to draw the French court’s attention to investigate Malaysia’s role in the massive naval equipment scandal involving top government and business officials across the world including in Pakistan, Taiwan, India, Chile, Argentina and Saudi Arabia.

Her other two teammates were Suaram director Kua Kia Soong and secretariat member Cynthia Gabriel.

Suaram has accused Putrajaya of failing to address the serious allegations of multimillion ringgit kickbacks involving high-ranking government officials, suggesting a deliberate suppression of information to keep the issue under wraps.

Malaysia paid RM6.7 billion in 2009 for the two submarines of which RM574 million was earmarked for co-ordination and support services for Perimekar Sdn Bhd, owned by political analyst Abdul Razak Baginda.

Abdul Razak, his wife Mazlinda Makhzan, a director in the company, and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak top a list of witnesses submitted by Suaram, Fadiyah said. Najib was defence minister when the RM7.3 billion deal was inked.

She said the French investigators have yet to finalise the witnesses to be called, and that even those named may defy the subpoena to testify without legislation forcing them to comply.

She clicked her tongue when recounting reading news reports that Defence Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had refused to testify in the Paris inquiry that started last week. She said she remembered him volunteering for it last year.

PM Najib has declined to comment on the matter when pointedly asked if he would attend the inquiry if subpoenaed.

"I don't need to comment... I don't want to comment, thank you," Najib was quoted as saying yesterday while on a day-trip to Penang to galvanise his Barisan Nasional (BN) ground troops ahead of national polls expected soon.

Fadiah said Suaram chose to file the case in France because it was left with no redress with authorities here.

The French prosecutors' decision to open the books on its defence giant DCNS's international business dealings was "an opportunity for Suaram and Malaysian taxpayers to seek the truth based on the investigation done on both French and Malaysian side."

"This is a mechanism that can be used to advocate accountability in cases related to the crime of corruption.

"Only through this inquiry all facts will be unravelled in the court of law for Malaysian taxpayers to answers as to what actually transpired," she said.

She added: "It is to be noted that one of Suaram's mandate is to advocate accountability and good governance."

Human rights groups and opposition parties have linked the submarine purchase to the 2006 murder of Mongolian translator Altantuya Shaariibuu, a one-time lover to Abdul Razak.

The former political analyst, who headed think-tank Malaysian Strategic Research, was acquitted of a charge of abetting two Special Action Squad members — Azilah Hadri and Sirul Azhar Umar — to commit the murder in 2006.

Earlier this month, Altantuya's father Dr Setev Shaariibuu told a press conference in Petaling Jaya that he had offered himself as a witness in the Scorpene submarine probe, claiming that his testimony would be able to "connect the dots" between her death and the Scorpene" case.

Fadiah said the tribunal was currently investigating the matter as a civil case but that Suaram's French counsel had told them the prosecutors may be filing criminal charges soon.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/scorpene-french-filing-last-chance-at-truth-says-suaram/>