

**Defence secretary-general to be asked about copter deal**

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid

**NILAI: Defence Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abu Bakar Abdullah will be among those called in to assist the Public Accounts Committee to look into the Eurocopter deal.**

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the committee would scrutinise details leading to the purchase of the helicopters at a two-day meeting beginning Oct 29.

"It is part of the normal procedure for us to call the ministry secretary-general to assist us. "We are going to scrutinise the case from two aspects, mainly the financial and technical side of it as well as the decision-making process which led to the eventual purchase.

"We feel two days would be sufficient as it will give the PAC enough time to study the matter objectively and scrutinise all the relevant details," he said after launching the Malaysia Audit Day yesterday.

The government recently announced the purchase of Cougar Eurocopter EC725 helicopters to replace the ageing Nuri helicopters at a cost of RM2.3 billion. The deal brought about controversy when one of the bidders of the helicopter contract, Mentari Services Sdn Bhd, questioned the offer to Eurocopter.

Azmi said: "We have been informed that the procurement was based following a tender process, but we will go through the entire process and urge all parties to be patient," he said.

Azmi said he hoped all 12 members of the PAC would be present during the two days.

On Monday, Deputy Prime Minister and former defence minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said that the cabinet had given the PAC the green light to investigate the procurement of the helicopters for the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) to replace the Nuris.

In a statement issued last week, Abu Bakar said the purchase was done according to procedures and that the issuance of the letter of intent to Eurocopter was not influenced by any parties.

On another matter, Azmi said the PAC has proposed that internal audit units in all government agencies and departments function more independently and report directly to the auditor-general.

By doing this, it would not only enhance the public delivery system, but also greatly avoid any abuse by the relevant heads of department who are now responsible for approving all internal departmental audit reports.

"At present, all internal audit reports are submitted to the relevant heads of department.

"This procedure is open to abuse as the members of the internal audit unit are at the end of the day going to approve the report and be answerable to their own head of department."