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Kit Siang: Hold Eurocopter deal for watchdog green light

PETALING JAYA: The Government should not go through with the purchase of helicopters from Eurocopter if the deal is not approved after the investigation by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and Parliament, Ipoh Timur MP Lim Kit Siang said.

He said the RM2.3bil deal should be suspended as it would be contempt of Parliament for the Defence Ministry to proceed without waiting for the outcome of the investigation.

"It is no exaggeration to say that this will be the most important investigation in PAC history as a major government contract will hinge on its report," he said in a statement Friday.

Lim said PAC should not depend solely on the technical and expert advice of ministry and Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) officials in its probe.

"PAC must have independent and professional advice from people knowledgeable and who have working experience in the aviation industry."

Lim said PAC should also call up representatives from the seven tender bidders.

He also said he was doubtful that a two-day hearing, from Oct 29-30, - was enough, considering the amount of data the PAC would have to scrutinise.

The deal was approved two days before Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak handed his over his Defence Minister portfolio to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and took up the latter's Finance Minister post in a straight swap.

Earlier in October, Mentari Services Sdn Bhd chairman Capt (Rtd) Zahar Hashim alleged the tender accepted during Najib's tenure as Defence Minister to replace the ageing Nuri helicopters was "too costly."

He claimed the Government could have saved almost RM1.5bil if it had bought the Kazan-M172 helicopters from Kelowna Flightcraft Ltd, a firm he represents.

He said the Kazan-M172 met all the specifications required by the armed forces and costs RM898mil while the Cougar EC-725 would cost the Government RM2.3bil.

Najib denied any irregularities and invited PAC to scrutinise the deal.