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NEWS PAPER CLIPPING

NEWS : THE STAR

DATES : FEBRUARY / 14 / 2025

PAGES : 10

Copter lease 'a strategic initiative'

28 units are involved, which will save Malaysia RM16.6bil over 15 years

KUALA LUMPUR: The government has chosen to lease 28 AugustaWestland 139 helicopters as part of a strategic initiative to optimise spending, distributing RM16.6bil more sustainably over 15 years, according to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said (pic).

In a written parliamentary reply, Azalina said the lease agreement included comprehensive maintenance, insurance coverage and training for over 1,300 personnel, ensuring a minimum fleet availability of 85% for all agencies utilising the helicopters.

"Our current government-owned helicopters range from 12 to 32 years old and are overutilised for critical operations such as search and rescue, medical evacuations,

security, logistics and humanitarian missions.

"The decommissioning of the Sikorsky S-61A-4 by the Malaysian Armed Forces in 2020 exacerbated the fleet gap, increasing the operational burden on existing helicopters," she said.

Azalina was responding to a question by Mumtaz Nawi (PN-Tumpat) regarding the government's allocation of RM16.6bil for the helicopter lease.

Mumtaz queried this expenditure in comparison to the RM9.8bil required to complete the East Coast Expressway Phase 3 (LPT3), questioning the government's spending priorities between these two significant infrastructure projects.

Azalina also cited a study by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, which revealed that between



2011 and 2015, the readiness level of Royal Malaysian Air Force aircraft was only 43%, significantly below the required minimum of 70%.

"Leasing allows us to enhance our fleet readiness while minimising fiscal pressure. Between 2020 and 2024, five government helicopters were lost, imposing a

substantial financial burden due to asset write-offs," she said.

The lease arrangement, Azalina added, also provided the government the option to purchase the helicopters for a nominal RM1 each at the end of the concession period.

More importantly, she said the government incurs no costs during the supply phase, including training expenses, which the concession company covers.

Azalina added that the leasing approach aligns with practices in advanced nations like France, Canada and the United Kingdom.

"Ensuring the readiness of strategic assets is paramount for safeguarding national sovereignty and public safety," she said.

On the LPT3 project, Azalina said it is being reviewed by the Federal government, in collabora-

tion with the Kelantan and Terengganu state governments.

"The consideration is on the proposed route and ensuring the project offers value for money and benefits the public, potentially through a public-private partnership to alleviate fiscal strain.

"The government remains dedicated to upgrading nationwide road networks, particularly on the East Coast, to ease traffic congestion during peak seasons.

"While planning continues, travellers to Kelantan can use the existing Central Spine Road, which connects to the East Coast Expressway. Based on the importance of both projects, the government decides to carefully consider project readiness and complexity rather than costs alone when prioritising critical national initiatives," she said.