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RM16B SPENDING

AZALINA: HELICOPTERS LEASED TO REPLACE AGEING ASSETS

It is also to raise preparedness levels and ease govt's fiscal burden, says law minister

KUALA LUMPUR

THE government's decision to spend RM16 billion to lease military helicopters stems from the need to replace ageing assets, enhance readiness levels and address fiscal considerations.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reforms) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said, in a written reply, told the Dewan Rakyat that many helicopters used by government agencies, including the armed forces, were between 12 and 32 years old.

These are used for search-and-rescue operations, humanitarian and medical services, as well as for security and military needs,



Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said

among others.

"The increasing demand for services has led to the excessive use of the helicopters despite their ageing condition, increasing the risks for aircraft crews.

"Moreover, the decommissioning of the Sikorsky S-61A-4, more commonly known as Nuri, by the armed forces in 2020 has created a gap in the number of helicopters in its fleet and added to the burden on the existing he-

licopters," she said in response to a question from Datuk Mumtaz Md Nawi (PN-Tumpat).

On readiness levels, Azalina cited a 2017 Universiti Teknologi Malaysia study, titled "Aircraft Acquisition Conceptual Framework", which found that the Royal Malaysian Air Force's (RMAF) aircraft readiness was at just 43 per cent between 2011 and 2015, compared to the minimum 70 per cent mark.

Azalina also elaborated on the government's fiscal burden, saying five government-owned helicopter crashed between 2020 and 2024, resulting in the assets being written off at great cost.

"The capital expenditure required to replace these assets through conventional means would strain the nation's fiscal position," she said.

Leasing the helicopters allows the government to optimise spending by distributing costs more sustainably over 15 years. This includes maintenance, insurance coverage and training for more than 1,300 personnel.

"(Additionally) the availability of the aircraft fleet for all user

agencies is guaranteed at a minimum of 85 per cent, with an option to purchase these aircraft at a nominal price of RM1 each at the end of the concession period."

Azalina said the leasing initiative meant zero upfront costs for the government, and that the concessionaire would pay for all costs, including training, until the assets were handed over to the government.

She added that the leasing involved 28 helicopters of various models with mission-specific equipment for the army, air force, navy, Fire and Rescue Department, the Prime Minister's Department and police.

"This leasing approach is also a common practice for managing strategic and security assets in developed countries such as France, Canada and the United Kingdom," she said.

Previously, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin had said the government's decision to lease 28 helicopters for RM16.6 billion was made in an orderly manner and based on necessity.