

Najib-Rosmah's ties with Saudi king help evacuations
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The government of Saudi Arabian granted unlimited access for the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF), MAS and AirAsia to airlift Malaysian evacuees from Egypt to Jeddah after getting a call from Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's wife Rosmah Mansor.

Last day of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Najib Abdul Razak takes over as prime minister in Putrajaya Reporting this today, the Star said the rare move was made possible due to the close personal relationship between Najib and Rosmah Mansor and the Saudi monarchy.

"I am very happy with the Saudi authorities for granting us all sorts of special concessions in the airlifting of our citizens," said Najib according to the English daily.

"They have told us that we can mount as many flights as we need in the rescue mission.

"This is a rare privilege, mostly because of the close personal ties my wife and I have with King Abdullah Abdul Aziz and his family," said Najib.

The Saudi government had granted blanket visas to all those evacuated from Egypt as well as landing rights for the eight RMAF, Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia aircraft taking part in the evacuation exercise, said the Star.

Rosmah: I reported to Najib... later

Last day of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Najib Abdul Razak takes over as prime minister in Putrajaya When faced with such a crisis, said Najib, it was diplomatically acceptable for both private and official channels to be used to ensure the rescue operation was successful.

"It is fortunate that we enjoy such a good relationship with the Saudi royal family. I was actually awakened at 2.30am on Thursday by a call from Saudi Arabia confirming the various special concessions for our airlift.

"I think it takes a very special friendship to work until so late to solve someone else's problem and then to call someone at that hour to tell them about the blanket approval."

Rosmah (left), on her part, reportedly said she had also made some calls because she could not stand by and watch the students suffer "as some of them had nothing to eat".

"As a mother, how could I not act? I feel for all the mothers whose children are studying there. I am glad I could help.

"Some of the Malaysian officials, aware of my Saudi connections, also asked me to assist. My husband was busy so that was why I helped," she said.

"I could not afford to take any risk by waiting as every minute matters in a situation like this. Waiting a minute could cost lives. That's why I made the call to the Saudis," she said.

"Of course, I reported to him (Najib) what I did later."

Students accomodated in Jeddah

Bername, meanwhile, has reported that Tabung Haji and the Malaysian Embassy in Saudi Arabia will think of other measures to accommodate Malaysian students from Egypt if the number of evacuees exceeds the capacity of the Madinatul Hujaj transit centre in Jeddah.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Jamil Khir Baharom said so far, more than 3,600 students had been placed at the centre which could accommodate up to 4,000 people at any one time.

"But this is not a problem because Tabung Haji has the experience in managing up to 30,000 haj pilgrims each time during the pilgrimage season.

"We are increasing the number of mattresses and pillows for use by the students. The sending off of a portion of the students on Sunday will enable us to reduce the congestion and accept other students who have just arrived from Cairo," he told Malaysian journalists in the port city yesterday.

Jamil Khir said that from the feedback received, it was clear that the students were satisfied with the facilities provided at the transit centre.

"Other facilities are also being provided, including wifi for them to communicate with family members as well as television sets at several locations to enable them to follow current developments," he said.

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