

'PM jetting around in new luxury aircraft?'

MalaysiaKini.com

Jan 3, 2014

Amid austerity measures, pro-Umno bloggers are questioning whether Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is now jetting across the country in a new luxury aircraft.

In blog postings by, among others, Big Dog and RockyBru, they pointed to an Airbus ACJ320 with tail number 9H-AWK using the call number, "Perdana 2" or "NR2" - which incidentally are similar to Najib's initials.

The aircraft is registered in Malta and leased from aviation group Comlux.

According to aviation news website Aviation Week, Jet Premier One (M) Sdn Bhd, the company which manages flights for VVIPs in Malaysia, including Najib, had indeed leased the Airbus ACJ320 from Comlux.

The lease was supposed to be a temporary replacement for the regular aircraft Najib uses, an Airbus ACJ319, being refurbished by Comlux Aviation Services.

The Airbus ACJ319 with tail number 9M-NAA operated under the call name "NR1" or "Perdana 1" and is the official aircraft for the prime minister, similar to that of the US president's Air Force One.

It first came under the spotlight in 2011 when Najib flew on the Airbus ACJ319 to Perth, Australia, apparently on holiday.

In a press release by Comlux May last year, the company had announced it had won a contract to rework the VIP area of the Airbus ACJ319 as well as handle scheduled maintenance works for six years.

The company did not specify the value of the project.

In the interim, Comlux leased an Airbus ACJ320 with tail number 9H-AWK to Jet Premier One.

It took over the call name of "NR1" and "Perdana 1" and was spotted taking off from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on Oct 6 to Denpasar International Airport, Bali, according to flight enthusiast site Jet Photos.

Najib left for Bali on Oct 6 for the Asia Pacific Economic Conference (Apec) Summit.

'RM27k an hour operate'

The aircraft comes with a lounge, a private room equipped with personal bathroom and has wifi and phone access while in the air.

Comlux did not reveal how much the plane was leased for but according to the company's brochure, the approximate operating cost for its Airbus ACJ320 flight is US\$8,350.31 (RM27,501.75) per hour.

In another press statement in October last year, Comlux announced that it has completed refurbishing the "head of state of Malaysia aircraft" Airbus ACJ319 after working on it since its arrival at its US base in June that year.

Despite the return of the plane, the lease for the Airbus ACJ320 appears to be still active and has been spotted jetting around in Malaysia.

The Airbus ACJ320 changed its call name to "NR2" or "Perdana 2" while the ACJ319 took back its call name "NR1" or "Perdana 1".

According to air traffic tracker website Flight Radar 24, the Airbus ACJ320 with tail number 9H-AWK last took off from KLIA under the call name "NR2" on Dec 31.

The site also recorded the Airbus ACJ319 with tail number 9M-NAA taking off from KLIA on Dec 26 under the call name "NR1".

In a parliamentary reply on Nov 7 last year, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Shahidan Kassim revealed that the government spent RM14.95 million for fuel and RM160.08 million in maintenance for VVIP flights in 2012.

The government aircraft include a Falcon, Global Express, Boeing Business Jet, Blackhawk, two Augustas and a Fokker F28.

However, that reply did not mention either the Airbus AC319 or Airbus ACJ320.

'PMO says aircraft lease over'

In an immediate response, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said the lease of the Airbus ACJ320, which started on Feb 1, 2013, ended on Dec 31 that year.

The PMO added that the lease of the Airbus ACJ320 was necessary due to a

shortage of government aircraft.

Prior to this, it said the government had five aircraft, namely the ACJ319, BBJ, Fokker F28, Global Express and Falcon 900.

"In August 2012, the Fokker F28 aircraft was decommissioned as it was over 30 years old and was not replaced.

"Last year, the BBJ and ACJ319 were scheduled for compulsory maintenance. The BBJ went through maintenance between January to July 2013 while the ACJ319 went through maintenance between June 15 to Oct 8, 2013.

"As such, the PMO which is responsible for special government aircraft took the decision to lease the ACJ320 to overcome the shortage of aircraft," it said.

The PMO added that the aircraft were not exclusively for Najib but is also used by the Agong, sultans, yang di-pertuas, ministers, deputy ministers, foreign guests to the federal government, senior government officials and VIPs.

It added that the aircraft allowed these individuals to move in and out of the country safely and helps with their busy schedule.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://beta.malysiakini.com/news/250846>