

RMAF needs Aewacs but PM buys VVIP jet?

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A former air force major has expressed “shock” that the government has chosen to spend on a new VVIP jet when the money could have been better spent on a badly needed Aewacs (airborne early warning and control system) surveillance planes.

“The revelation by Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli is very, very shocking and saddens me,” said former Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) pilot Zaidi Ahmad.

He was referring to Rafizi’s claim that the government has purchased a RM465 million Airbus ACJ320 for what the Prime Minister’s Office this week claimed was for the use of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, Zaidi said he should emulate Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who proudly flies anywhere with the country’s flag carrier Turkish Airlines.

Zaidi lamented that small countries such as Singapore has owned Aewacs aircraft since 1987, “While Malaysia that is many times larger than Singapore doesn’t even have one?”

In a Whatsapp message to Malaysiakini, the former major said had the government spent on an Aewacs plane instead of another executive jet, the tragic disappearance of MAS Flight MH370 could have been averted.

He said the Aewacs plane could have detected the MAS plane as it flew off radar over Malaysian airspace.

An Aewacs aircraft is essential a flying radar station used for military purposes. It take advantage of its high vantage point to extend its detection range, and coordinates the response against possible threats.

Zaidi said the RMAF has long lobbied the government to acquire Aewacs aircraft, ever since Singapore acquired its own fleet of four E-2C Hawkeye aircraft in the 1980s.

Zaidi has been a fierce critic of the government’s botched initial response to the aircraft’s disappearance.

Last week he challenged Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein to resign over the air force’s failure to detect the plane as it turned back from its Beijing route and headed across Malaysia’s northern airspace.

The ill-fated flight vanished off commercial radar in the early hours of March 8, 2014 as it entered Vietnam airspace.

'Unidentified object detected flying towards Penang'

However after an initial scramble to search the sea south of Vietnam, the Malaysian government admitted that an unidentified object had been detected flying towards Penang that fateful morning.

It was eventually confirmed the object was MH370 flying towards its till today undetermined final location somewhere in the south Indian Ocean.

Till today no one has been held accountable for the tragic oversight.

Zaidi (left) argued that an Aewacs aircraft would be more effective than ground-based radar stations in ensuring border security and in finding lost or rogue aircraft, including MH370 if claims that it had flown close to the ground to avoid radar detection are true.

He said this is because the shape of the terrain and the horizon would both produce blindspots of ground-based radar, which can be exploited by low-flying aircraft to mount a surprise attack.

It is also susceptible to air raids and sabotage because it is stationary.

Compared to fighter aircraft, Zaidi said Aewacs aircraft can detect ships and aircraft up over 350 kilometres away with an all-around view, whereas radar used by fighters can only detect ships and aircraft in front of them unless it is working in coordination with Aewacs aircraft.

Aewacs aircraft can also stay aloft for four to six hours, compared to the mere two to three hours for fighter aircraft, he said.

“The Malaysian government’s refusal to fulfil the RMAF’s request to buy Aewacs aircraft even after the MH370 tragedy shows that this government is arrogant and do not care about national security, and the safety of its people and thousands of foreign tourists who enter the country daily,” he said.