

Come clean on Paris delegation, MP tells Pak Lah

MalaysiaKini.com

Jan 14th, 2016

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MP SPEAKS It was reported earlier today in Malaysiakini that former prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that NGO Landskap Malaysia - chaired by his wife, Jeanne Abdullah - had paid for his trip to Paris "with some help" from other sources.

For the interests of transparency, Abdullah should answer the following questions:

1. How much did the Malaysian government pay for the flight tickets, hotel rooms and car rentals of Abdullah's delegation?

According to some records which I have obtained, Abdullah's delegation comprised of himself, his wife, and nine other individuals - including his personal physician, Dr Aizai Azan Abdul Rahim, his aide-de-camp, Supt Mohd Khairi Khairudin, and two bodyguards.

Interestingly, based on said records - which gives the rooming list and rental car arrangements for Abdullah's delegation - the hotel and car rental payments for two individuals in the delegation, Dzulkifli David Abdullah and Dr Dzaeman Dzulkifli David, were labelled as "personal payments". These two individuals were also labelled as being the "personal friends of former PM" Abdullah.

According to Landskap Malaysia's website, Dzulkifli David Abdullah is listed as a member of its board of governors while Dr Dzaeman Dzulkifli is listed as an alternate member of the same.

This seems to indicate that Landskap Malaysia paid for the hotel and rental car expenses of its two board members, whereas the expenses of the rest of Abdullah's delegation were paid for by the Malaysian government.

Abdullah's delegation stayed at Hotel Marriot Champs-Élysées, a five-star hotel in the heart of Paris. According to the records obtained, Abdullah and his wife booked a vice-presidential suite while the rest of his delegation booked five deluxe rooms and one twin sharing - further excluding another twin sharing room for the board members of Landskap Malaysia.

A quick search on the Hotel Marriot Champs-Élysées indicates that the rate for a suite is RM3,725 per night for the month of January while the rate for a deluxe room is RM1,774 per night. The total rental for Abdullah's suite for one week would have been RM22,350 while the total rental for the deluxe room is RM10,644. (This is probably an understatement since the hotel rates would have been higher during the UN Climate Change Conference.)

The records also indicate that Abdullah rented a Mercedes Benz S500 for one week and his

delegation rented a Mercedes Viano (MPV) for one week. A quick check on one of the car rental websites shows that the rental cost for one week for a Mercedes Benz SUV is Euro3586 (RM16,854) while the rental cost for one week for a MPV Mercedes Viao is Euro2523 (RM11,858).

The total estimated cost for hotel rooms and car rentals comes up to approximately RM115,000 (not including flight tickets, or the hotel and car rental for the two NGO board members). Was this the “help” which Abdullah had referred to in his remarks to the Malaysiakini reporter earlier today?

2. If the Malaysian government did fund all or a significant portion of the expenses for Abdullah’s delegation to Paris, what exactly was achieved by this delegation during that one week?

There is nothing wrong with the government footing the bill for Abdullah and his delegation if there had been in Paris to participate in the Climate Change Conference or a side event, in ways that would be of benefit to Malaysia.

For example, they may have been in Paris to ask for funding from developed countries or foundations in developed countries to help preserve forests and jungles in Malaysia.

For the sake of transparency, Abdullah should disclose the exact purpose of his visit to Paris and the outcomes which were achieved as a result of this visit.

At a time when many Malaysians have to cut down on their everyday expenses because of the rising costs of living, our taxpayers should not be funding expensive trips or holidays abroad for politicians in ways which do not seem to benefit Malaysia in any direct or indirect way.