

Pak Lah: Govt leasing, not buying, plane

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SEPAANG: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi confirmed the government will be getting a newly refurbished Airbus aircraft.

However, he dispelled speculation in the Internet that the government was purchasing the aircraft. "We are not buying it. We are only leasing it," he said.

The government will lease it from Penerbangan Malaysia Bhd (PMB), which purchased it, he said, adding that the money for the purchase was from PMB.

Websites reported that Abdullah had bought an ACJ 319 VIP jet from Airbus.

"Why is there a need for us to purchase it when we can lease it," he told reporters yesterday at the KL International Airport, after returning from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and a working visit to London.

On hand to greet him was Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak.

Abdullah said it made good sense for the government to lease the aircraft, which was cheaper than purchasing it.

"If there were anything to wrong with it, it could be returned to the quarters we leased it from and be replaced" he said, adding that the money for that would not come from the government.

"I will tell you later how much we are leasing it

for," he said in response to a question from the press.

He said the aircraft was meant for the government's use, as well as for the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Commenting on the Batu Talam state by-election, Abdullah praised the voters in the constituency for exercising their constitutional right despite a boycott by PAS and Parti Keadilan Rakyat.

The voter's showed that they could make intelligent decisions, he said. "It shows that democracy is still healthy in the country," he added.

The prime minister advised the newly elected Batu Talam state assemblyman, Abdul Aziz Mat Kiram, who was also present, to carry out his duty as a wakil rakyat honestly and to serve the rakyat well.