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'New jet for security purposes'

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PARAMOUNT: It's to ensure PM and Agong's safety as practised by other countries, says Salleh

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Former prime minister **Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad** has questioned the government's purchase of the **private jet**



Sabah assembly speaker **Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak** says the issue of security is **paramount**

THE procurement of the private jet for heads of state, including the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the prime minister, is to provide suitable transportation and ensure their security as practised by other countries.

Sabah assembly speaker Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak said since the police's special branch unit's warning that Malaysia faced the risk of a terrorist attack, specifically from the Islamic State, the issue of security was paramount.

"The security of the Agong and PM cannot be taken lightly.

"Hence the need for suitable and efficient transportation for them.

"Security cannot be considered only in terms of money. Security costs money and it

is the same all over the world, especially in these troubling times," Salleh wrote in his blog, sskeruak.blogspot.com, yesterday.

The former Sabah chief minister was responding to former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who in his blog, had raised questions, among others, on the murder of Mongolian national Altantuya Shaaribuu, the purchase of the private jet by the government and IMalaysia Development Berhad (IMDB).

Citing an example, Salleh said it cost more than RM5 billion a year for the security of the United States president and his family, and by the time Barack Obama leaves office, the cost of security would amount to more than RM40 billion of taxpayers' money.

"When the US president travels, he is obliged to take Air Force One and it costs more than RM700,000 an hour to run the plane.

"Obama's 10-day trip to India, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan cost RM32 million

just for Air Force One alone while the trip to Portugal for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation conference cost RM10 million.

"In fact, Obama's dog handler is paid more than RM360,000 a year while the rest of the 226 members of his staff are each paid RM300,000 to RM400,000 a year.

"Such is the cost of security for heads of state."

He said the security of the British royal family cost British taxpayers RM280 billion a year, with members of the British prime minister's protection unit earning RMS00,000 a year.

"The total amount that (former prime minister) Tony Blair cost the taxpayers was RM34 million annually back then, although it has been reduced somewhat today. The 20 officers, who were assigned to protect Blair, cost RM2.5 million a month.

"I am not saying that since it costs a lot of money to protect the British prime minister and US president, this justifies doing the same in Malaysia.

"The point I am making is that security is not cheap and security includes proper transportation for heads of state, such as the PM and Agong."

On IMDB, Salleh said the sovereign wealth fund had just started and needed time to prove its viability.