

Copter leasing arrangement ensures transparency, says Anwar

THE government has decided to adopt a leasing model for procuring helicopters for Malaysia's security forces to ensure transparency and ease the financial burden, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said leasing arrangements would allow transparent negotiations through government-to-government (G2G) agreements, without involving agents.

He said that while some countries might opt to purchase helicopters at a lower initial cost, maintenance expenses over time often surpassed the purchase price.

"Leasing helps alleviate the burden of maintenance, which is a significant issue. Maintenance costs run into billions of ringgit annually, including repairs and natural wear and tear," he told the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Anwar supported continuing the leasing arrangement, which had already been decided, but said that it would be conducted via a request for proposal (RFP) process to ensure proper main-

tenance, repair and overhaul of the aircraft.

He was addressing concerns raised by Datuk Seri Ikmal Hisham Abdul Aziz (PN-Tanah Merah) about the absence of an international open tender or G2G agreement for the helicopter lease.

Anwar said that Weststar Aviation Sdn Bhd was selected based on its submission through the RFP process.

The company met key criteria, including the ability to secure substantial capital and holding the necessary certifications to operate helicopters.

He said Weststar already operated 28 Leonardo helicopters and had extensive experience in Saudi Arabia.

"We are proceeding with this company, but under the condition that all assets meet the needs of various agencies, including the navy, air force, police, armed forces, Fire and Rescue Department, and the Prime Minister's Department."

Anwar said that the lease agreement also required the heli-

copters to maintain an 85 per cent operational readiness rate.

He said Malaysia planned to collaborate with local institutions, such as Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and the Royal Malaysian Air Force, to boost Malaysia's position as an aviation hub.

A proposed training centre in Melaka, near Batu Berendam Airport, will support this initiative.

Addressing concerns from Bagan MP Lim Guan Eng about the long-term viability of leasing helicopters, particularly with rapid technological advancements, Anwar acknowledged the need to adapt to evolving technology.

He said that the lease was based on current needs, but in two to three years, the armed forces would reassess and provide an updated list of priorities.

"In conflicts like those in Ukraine and between Iran, Israel, and Hizbollah, drones have emerged as a priority. We must continuously monitor and update our needs in line with technological advancements."

Anwar also addressed the matter of discussing military specifications openly in Parliament, responding to a suggestion by Ikmal Hisham that the lease proposal be brought to the Parliamentary Special Select Committee for greater transparency.

Anwar disagreed, saying, "No one in the world discusses specifications and security requirements openly. Matters related to national security, such as scrutinising specifications and military equipment, should not be debated in the committee."

He said that helicopter specifications were determined by the respective security agencies based on their operational needs, not by the government itself.

He said while the process would continue with the leasing agreement, discussions on the specific needs of each branch of the armed forces would be a collective approach involving all agencies.

"We will consolidate the needs of all organisations requiring helicopters, rather than negotiating through agents with separate tenders."