

## **MAS' 'nightmare' caused by previous leader, says Najib**

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**By Aedi Asri**

### **The prime minister pledges to revive the fortunes of the national carrier and return it to 5-star status.**

SEPANG: Prime Minister Najib Razak has blamed "a previous leader" for the troubles which befell Malaysia Airlines (MAS) in recent years.

Without naming the leader concerned, Najib said he would not go down the same road and, instead, pledged to revive the national carrier.

"We have gone through many tough times. The history of MAS is replete with bad decisions made by a leader who preceded me.

"That is the nightmare that befell MAS, but I will rectify it," he said at a Raya event here today.

"I will ensure that MAS is revived and becomes a premier airline company in the world."

The two prime ministers who preceded Najib were Dr Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003) and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2003-2009).

One of Dr Mahathir's most controversial decisions regarding MAS was its privatisation to entrepreneur Tajudin Ramli in 1994.

Tajudin, who became executive chairman of MAS, was badly affected by the 1997 Asian financial crisis and forced to sell his 32% stake in the airline back to the government.

The deal was heavily criticised because the equity was sold at RM8 a share when the company's closing share price on Bursa Malaysia at the time was only RM3.68.

Abdullah also courted controversy when the airline awarded the catering service contract to a company owned by a member of his family.

Najib said the first phase of MAS' rehabilitation, which was to stabilise its financial position, had been completed.

The next phase, as announced by its CEO Peter Bellew some months ago, involved increasing its flight routes, including to China.

“I believe MAS is capable of returning to the 5-star status awarded by Skytrax (a global airline ranking consultancy) by 2018,” he said.

Najib also expressed delight that nearly all the 6,000 former employees of MAS, who were retrenched in the airline’s restructuring exercise, had since found new jobs.

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