

No decision on city airport plan

**From
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in Paris**

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government has yet to decide on a proposal to turn the Royal Malaysian Air Force station in Sungai Besi into a commercial airport to serve the Federal capital, much like the City of London airport in England.

The Prime Minister said the relevant authorities were still in the process of studying the matter in greater detail.

Dr Mahathir, who is here for a 1½-day working visit, was speaking to newsmen who accompanied him on the visit.

Dr Mahathir on Friday visited the City of London airport to see for himself the physical and operational aspects of the airport. He said he found the concept interesting.

Dr Mahathir, who earlier visited the ongoing Paris Air Show, flew into London to see the airport located in the Docklands area. He told newsmen that his tour of the city airport was to enable him to gain some background which could be used when studying the Kuala

Lumpur proposal.

Asked whether the proposal would be undertaken by the Government or the private sector, Dr Mahathir said if the idea is to be implemented, it would probably be left to the private sector.

Dr Mahathir was given a briefing on the City of London airport and also visited Canary Wharf, the surrounding area which was also developed as a support centre for the airport.

At the briefing, the Prime Minister was told that private aircraft could fly into the airport and passengers were able to proceed on their journey to the city in a very short period of time.

It took about seven minutes for a passenger to be cleared after landing at the airport and he could get into the city in about 10 minutes. This would be convenient for businessmen and those in a hurry, he was told.

Apart from those with their own jets, the City of London airport also serves several small airlines and subsidiaries of major airlines. Asked whether he would incorporate some ideas from the City of London into the proposal in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir said the Government has yet to decide on the proposal.

The proposal to turn the RMAF base into a city airport was submitted to the Government by South Malaysia Industries Berhad, a public listed company.

Newsmen were later given a briefing by SMI chairman, Datuk Mohd Ramli Kushairi, on the proposal. He said city airports are a niche market and SMI's proposal was to enable it to get into the sector.

Ramli said: "We feel that it would be a waste just to turn the Sungai Besi air base into yet another property. It was an international airport once, and we feel that it should be put to better use.

"It would be costly to build another airport, and we feel that we should do something about it. We submitted the proposal to the Government last year."

If the Government decides to approve the proposal, the project would be undertaken within the Government's privatisation programme. The RMAF base covers about 485 acres, which includes not only the runway and air movement areas but the quarters as well.

Asked how much capital investments would be included in the proposed project, Ramli said it would be very costly. "It could run

into more than RM1 billion eventually," he said.

Ramli said SMI would be able to start the project three years from now since it already has the technical know-how and the human resources for such an undertaking.

The proposal would turn the station into an environment-friendly airport and would meet the requirements of STOAL aircraft (short take off and landing). This would suit the needs of most businessmen on such aircraft.

The ongoing Paris Air Show have several such aircraft on display.

There are many manufacturers who produce regional jets which meet the needs of fast-moving businessmen.

Ramli said the proposed airport would serve passengers on a city-to-city basis. Using regional jets which have a four-hour flying time, this could mean that the proposed KL City Airport could take aircraft coming in from as far as Hong Kong.

Ramli said the proposal would also include spin-offs such as hotels, shopping and office complexes and even recreation facilities. "The SMI team is ready to move if we are given the go-ahead," Ramli said.