

Dr M: New airline can boost the region

By Joniston Bangkuai

KOTA KINABALU, Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he expected businesses in the East Asean Growth Area (EAGA) to pick up at greater speed with the inception of Saeaga Airlines.

The Prime Minister said the new air services would make travelling within the EAGA, covering Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysia, Kalimantan in Indonesia, Southern Philippines and Brunei, a lot easier.

Besides speeding up economic development, he said, the introduction of the airline would boost the tourism trade within EAGA.

The establishment of the airline, he said, was also

proof of the close co-operation between Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines to jointly develop the EAGA.

Dr Mahathir said Saeaga Airlines was the result of a concept of regional co-operation mooted by Philippine President Fidel Ramos.

He said Ramos viewed that there would be better results if the four neighbouring countries worked together to help develop aviation services rather than operating on their own.

Since the idea was mooted, Dr Mahathir said, there has been several meetings among various Ministers of the four countries and all agreed that there should be a follow-up on the proposal.

"The Governments of the four countries have responded very well and now

we see concrete results of the co-operation," he said at the launching of the airline at the Kota Kinabalu Airport old terminal building here.

"I feel that given time there will be a lot of travellers using the routes proposed by the airline.

"We will see this area grow as rapidly as the rest of South East Asia and the rest of East Asia," he added.

The regional-based Saeaga Airlines is a joint venture between the Sabah and Sarawak Governments and Ekran Sdn Bhd.

He said co-operation from the countries within the EAGA was vital to ensure the success of the venture.

Describing the launching of the airline as momentous for Sabah and Sarawak, Dr Mahathir pledged the Feder-

al Government's full co-operation to ensure its success.

Stressing that both Kota Kinabalu and Kuching needed direct flights to the various destinations within the EAGA, he said with the inception of the airline it would be easier for the people in the region to travel between Kuching and Kota Kinabalu and also those destinations in the neighbouring countries.

Saeaga Airlines has purchased one Canadair Regional Jet and two de Havilland Dash 8 aircraft from Bombardier Regional Aircraft Division for its initial operation.

When operational next year, Saeaga's aircraft will represent the first Canadair Regional Jet service in the Asia-Pacific Region.