

PM wants Langkawi Airport to be a catalyst for development

# Runway to growth

By Ahmad A. Talib

LANGKAWI, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today opened the new terminal of the Langkawi Airport with a string of suggestions to help it be used as a catalyst for more development in the area, adding that Malaysia Airlines should initiate direct international flights to the island.

He also said that in the long run, the Government wanted the airport runway to be extended to accommodate bigger aircraft such as the Boeing 747.

Flights to Langkawi are presently confined to domestic and regional flights.

The Prime Minister said this in his speech when launching the new terminal at Padang Mat Sirat.

The official opening of the terminal precedes the opening of the third Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition (Lima '95) on Tuesday.

Making specific reference to this, Dr Mahathir said: "I congratulate Malaysia Airports Berhad for being able to commission the terminal in time for Lima '95.

"This will give visitors to Lima '95 an opportunity to see from close up the rapid development in Langkawi since Lima '93." Dr Mahathir said.

The figure was the highest in the region, and probably the world too, the Prime Minister said.

Passenger arrivals at the airport is projected to reach one million this year. Malaysia Airports Berhad rebuilding of the new terminal is therefore timely.

Under this project, MAB has not only increased the size of the terminal but also added new facilities such as shopping areas, restaurants, and tourist counters.

Dr Mahathir said in providing these services, MAB had succeeded in the balancing act of meeting the needs of all airport users as well as its own roles as a business entity or corporate body.

With the new terminal ready and the tourism industry thriving in Langkawi, he said the Langkawi airport was capable of playing an important role in the joint development of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand growth triangle.

The Prime Minister said: "With the Government's liberal policy on aviation services, I'm quite sure foreign airlines will take this opportunity to operate to Langkawi as soon as possible."

Dr Mahathir said that the "extraordinary" growth had made it necessary for the Government to increase the

tional Airport in Subang. The Subang airport which started off with one terminal and a short runway, today boasts several terminals and various facilities.

New facilities and services will be added to the Sepang airport until total investments in the airport eventually come close to RM20 billion.

"This is an investment that will benefit the nation," Dr Mahathir said.

He also proposed that MAB, Malaysia Airlines, the various government agencies and private entities involved in providing services at airports, take the initiative for an integrated approach in providing overall airport services.

As for Langkawi, Dr Mahathir proposed that a review be undertaken on the development of Padang Mat Sirat because of the rapid physical development in the area.

If this is to be properly done, the area can become a development centre that is attractive as well as synergistic with the on-going development in the local civil aviation industry.

Any development along these lines, however, must be well planned and should also benefit the people of Langkawi.

The Langkawi Interna-

He said Malaysia did not wish to be left behind in what was today seen as "the big race in airport-building," insisting that this was because airports were no longer just a "public infrastructure" but more of a "business investment".

Airports have a great impact on a country's economic, social and political developments.

Citing the island's airport as an example, Dr Mahathir said that since the airport was expanded to accommodate Airbus aircraft in 1987, traffic at the airport had doubled every year.

From just 17,300 passenger arrivals in 1987, it handled 873,000 passenger arrivals last year — 50 times more in a brief span of seven years.

size of terminals in all airports by two-fold before corporatising them under Malaysia Airports Berhad.

Asia Pacific is forecast to experience the highest rate of growth in the aviation industry for the coming few decades.

In Malaysia, new airports are replacing old ones that are no longer able to meet current or future needs. Which is why it is not uncommon that billions of ringgit is allocated, and reclamation work undertaken, to build airports.

The Government will invest some RM9 billion to develop the KL International Airport in Sepang, due for completion in early 1998.

The new airport at Sepang will grow just like the existing Kuala Lumpur Interna-

tional Airport RM70 million new terminal is one of the most modern in the country.

The new terminal was opened to the public in September and is capable of handling about 1,000 passengers at any one time compared to only 400 previously.

Among facilities located in the new terminal are the VIP and VVIP lounges and the MAS Golden Lounge for domestic and international passengers, as well as four restaurants and 23 duty-free shops.

There are also 18 check-in counters, four Customs and eight Immigration counters. For passengers' convenience, high-speed baggage-handling systems have been installed.