

25 JUL 1996

Mahathir-Airport

AIRPORTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC NEED RM498 BILLION BOOST

LANGKAWI, July 25 (Bernama) -- Asia-Pacific countries will have to spend over US\$200 billion (RM498 billion) until the year 2010 for development of airports if they are to keep pace with the phenomenal air traffic growth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Quoting estimates by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), he said the last five years alone had seen almost explosive growth in the number of outbound leisure travellers from Japan and the newly industrialised nations of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

"Many of Asia's major international airports are already suffering from severe congestion.

"In some cases, passenger and cargo terminals are unable to handle the volume of traffic, especially at peak hours, while in other cases airports are unable to handle an increase in the number of aircraft and their increasing size and capacities due to runway limitations," he said in a speech at the opening of the International Airport Technology and Ground Support Exhibition (Airportex) here.

The text of his speech was read by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

Dr Mahathir said several new airport projects are already on the drawing board or under construction in Asia with a massive round of public and public sector spending to alleviate congestion on the ground.

A total of 111 companies representing developers of airports and ground handling operators from 17 countries are taking part in the exhibition which showcases the latest airport equipment and systems, including on communication, navigation and surveillance, for air traffic management.

Dr Mahathir said the new international gateway airports in Hong Kong, China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Malaysia were planned for capacities of more than 40 million passengers a year and capable of accommodating the next generation of very large capacity aircraft.

In addition, they will also have the latest in hi-tech systems to move people, baggage and cargo as well as being more environmentally sensitive than existing airports.

Apart from the high profile international airports, the Prime Minister said upgrading and redevelopment works are in progress at many regional and hub airports throughout the region.

Almost every Asian nation is developing its airport infrastructure, with China alone modernising its existing 140 airports and building several new provincial airports in the coming decades, he said.

Dr Mahathir said problems were not only confined to the ground because the problem of traffic management in the air could also contribute to congestion.

"Bottlenecks in airways over remote areas and oceans, as well as inadequate approach radar systems at some airports, can cause inconvenience and delays and can add substantially to airline fuel bills," he said.

But thanks to new satellite-based air navigation and traffic management systems, air traffic management is in for better times.

Systems such as Communication, Navigation and Surveillance Air Traffic Management (CNS-ATM) are currently being tested over the South Pacific and it will not be long before the aviation world reaps the full benefits of the latest systems.

He said the advent of CNS-ATM systems will allow many Asian nations

with large land masses such as the Indian subcontinent, China, Mongolia, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (comprising former Soviet republics) and the Russian Far East to leapfrog straight into new technology at only a fraction of the price of having to install conventional land-based networks of beacons and radar stations and VHF radio stations.

But he said air transport is not only about aeroplanes because more and more discerning travellers are concerned about what happens on the ground.

"They are concerned about the quality of airports, with their terminals and ground handling facilities. These must match the ever increasing sophistication of the aircraft which fly passengers to myriads of destinations worldwide.

"In many places in Southeast Asia, ground handling and other services leave much to be desired," he added.

Referring to Airportex, the Prime Minister said it is being held at a most opportune time in the light of major developments in airport construction and upgrading.

"Airportex also affords an excellent opportunity for industry professionals and experts to meet and exchange views, ideas and share their experiences," he said. -- BERNAMA

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