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Air Asia may be next airline to fly to Zagreb

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THE Croatian Government has agreed in principle to allow another designated Malaysian airline, possibly Air Asia, to fly to Zagreb, apart from Malaysia Airlines, the national air carrier.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said this was agreed by Croatian Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa during his meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"The Croatian Government has accepted the suggestion by the Malaysian side that they should also accept another designated Malaysian airline to fly to Croatia, instead of just Malaysia Airlines.

"And, the possibility is for Air Asia to fly to Zagreb," he told journalists after attending the delegation meeting.

Matesa is on a three-day visit to Malaysia beginning yesterday.

Abdullah said the Transport Ministry will undertake the task as a follow-up to the proposal.

"(Transport Minister) Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik was present at the meeting and he will have to undertake further discussions on the possibility of Air Asia flying to Zagreb," he added.

The proposed air link between Kuala Lumpur and Zagreb using Air Asia would perhaps augur well with the export of Proton cars to Croatia.

Air Asia and Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton), the national car manufacturer, are both placed under the leadership of DRB-Hicom chairman Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad.

Abdullah also said Dr Mahathir had expressed his appreciation to the Croatian Government for importing more Proton cars.

"There is already a good market for Proton cars in Croatia," he added.

Besides the landing rights, Abdullah said both prime ministers also decided the possibility of introducing a code-sharing formula between the designated Malaysian airlines and Croatian airlines.

It was understood that Malaysia Airlines had been given the landing rights by the Croatian Government several years ago but the national carrier has yet to exercise the right.

Last March, Malaysia and Croatia signed an air service agreement granting fifth freedom traffic rights for designated airlines of both countries on any three immediate points of the airlines' respective choice.

However, both countries have yet to decide the destinations covered under the fifth freedom traffic rights.

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