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Back on schedule

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AFTER a slight delay, work on the ground support facilities complexes at the KL International Airport in Sepang is back on schedule, says Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

Dr Ling told reporters he was confident both complexes will be completed in time to be operational by September 15 this year. However, full ground-handling services will only begin commercially on January 1 next year, the date when the entire airport site opens.

He said this after visiting the construction sites of these complexes which belong to Malaysia Airlines and KL Airport Services Sdn Bhd (KLAS) respectively.

With work back on schedule, Dr Ling said he would not need to visit the Malaysia Airlines ground support facilities complex as frequently anymore. Earlier, he had announced that he would visit the construction site once a week in a bid to ensure it is completed on schedule.

"We don't have to visit the complex on a weekly basis anymore.

"I'll come here once every two weeks now," he said, adding that his next scheduled visit will be on May 5.

Two to three weeks ago, there were some concerns that these facilities, particularly Malaysia Airlines' catering and cargo facilities, may not be ready for the opening of the airport because of delays in the construction work.

"But through various meetings held among Malaysia Airlines authorities, airport consultants, contractors and suppliers, these problems have been rectified," he said.

He said the "success" was due to Malaysia Airlines and the consultants' quick move in spotting the delay in its work schedule and had initiated a recovery plan in October last year.

"So far, the recovery plan is working," he added.

Dr Ling said he was satisfied with the progress on KLAS' cargo complex which will have the capacity to handle 150,000 tonnes of cargo per year, with room to increase the capacity to 250,000 tonnes.

"KLAS' kitchen complex meantime will be able to handle up to 8,500 meals per day, and the capacity can also be increased to 12,000 meals," he added.

Meanwhile, Dr Ling said the launching date of the Express Rail Link (ERL) system, which links KLIA and the new Brickfields Central Station, will not coincide with the opening of the new airport.

"The ERL system was not planned to be operational in time for KLIA's opening as it was forecast that the existing roads would be a sufficient means of transport for a short period of time," he said.

He said two expressways will be ready to transport passengers from Kuala Lumpur to KLIA.

They are the present North-South Expressway cutting through Nilai and the dedicated North-South Central Link which is expected to be completed in October this year.

Dr Ling also explained that the proposed electronic system announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during the ground-breaking ceremony for the Kuala Lumpur Central Station, is "a reconciliation of baggage with the passenger".

"In the past, it was very dangerous when you cannot reconcile the passenger with the baggage, especially in situations where people with the

intention of placing a bom in the plane would actually not be on board.

"Thus in circumstances like that, it caused tremendous delay to our flights because when you find the passenger missing, you have to look for the baggage all over again and remove it," he said.

With the proposed electronic system, Dr Ling said passengers will be tracked using their fingerprints.

"When checking in, the passenger's fingerprints will be recorded in the computer which will then be transferred to the baggage tag.

"Thus when he or she goes pass the Customs, all they have to do is to show their boarding pass which will be scanned through the computer, and a message indicating that the passenger has gone through and so will their baggage," he said.

Dr Ling said the proposed electronic system will first be implemented at the present international airport in Subang, followed by a pilot project in Langkawi before it is eventually introduced at the KLIA.

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