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Boeing makes historic landing at KLIA despite low visibility

SEPANG, Mon. - The low visibility caused by the haze surrounding the Kuala Lumpur International Airport did not prevent a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 747-400 from making a historic first landing this morning.

Piloted by Captain Samsudin Zainol Abidin and assisted by Captain Arshad Abu Bakar, the aircraft experienced a virtually "problem-free" landing, touching down on KLIA's Runway I at 10.25am.

The landing, which was the highlight of the start of basic trials at the airport, was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Ministers.

Dr Mahathir described the landing as good despite the hazy condition.

"It went all right. The landing was good ... the runway lights were also good," he told reporters.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that the airport's commercial operations would start as scheduled in the first quarter of next year.

The haze did affect a small aspect of the specially-planned test landing, when a low-level fly-past from the north-end of the airport had to be cancelled.

"Forward visibility was only 500 metres ... so the fly-past would have been dangerous," said Samsudin.

The departure of flight MH1509 with seven people on board from the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang, was delayed by 20 minutes.

But Samsudin said: "The delay was not caused by the haze but congestion at Subang."

The Boeing 747 was supposed to leave at 9.40am but it got clearance only at 10am.

Besides the pilots, those aboard were Malaysia Airlines executive chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, executive vice-president (airline) Datuk Bashir Ahmad, vice-president of flight operations Captain Nawawi Awang, in-flight supervisor Anwar Awang, and a video cameraman.

Samsudin, 43, a pilot with the airline since 1975, and Arshad, 51, who joined MAS in 1972, described the historic flight as "just part of the job".

They, however, heaped accolades on the KLIA, saying that it was a "lovely place" and "one which a person can get obsessed with".

Samsudin was involved in the landing project right from the beginning and roped in Arshad, one of the airline's pioneer pilots, along the way.

There had initially been reservations about the landing due to the worsening haze.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the successful landing showed that Malaysia had the capability to build an "outstanding" airport in such a short period.

Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam said he was privileged to have witnessed the landing.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, in congratulating all those involved, described the landing as "brilliantly executed".

Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek said he would savour the moment when he saw the aircraft touch the runway. He said Malaysians should be proud of the KLIA, which is equipped with the latest facilities and would help spearhead the country into the next millennium.

In conjunction with his visit, Dr Mahathir planted a sapling of the

Merawan Siput Jantan (Hopea Odorata) at the central hub of the satellite terminal building which has been landscaped to depict a tropical forest.

Dr Mahathir also inspected airport vehicles (two fire vehicles, a runway friction tester, runway sweeper and two airport limousines), passenger loading bridges, the main terminal building and contact pier.

The airport limousines, operated by Airport Limo (M) Sdn Bhd, will number 1,500 when operations start.

At the contact pier and satellite terminal building are 75 passenger loading bridges equipped with pre-conditioned air, 400Hz power supply system and portable water system to service aircraft.

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