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Direct air links established with Mongolia

Rose Ismail in Ulan Bator, Mongolia

MALAYSIA and Mongolia yesterday signed an air services agreement which will pave the way for direct air links between the two countries. The agreement was signed by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Mongolian Minister of Infrastructure, Niamdava in the Mongolian Parliament House.

It was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Mongolian counterpart M. Enkhasaikhan.

Dr Ling told reporters after the signing ceremony that discussions would soon begin on a code-sharing arrangement which will allow both MIAT (Mongolian Airlines) and Malaysia Airlines to share passengers at intermediate points.

Currently, he said, Malaysia Airlines flew to Beijing, Shanghai and Seoul.

Under the agreement, if there are passengers wanting to fly beyond these points to Ulan Bator, arrangements will be made by Malaysia Airlines to transfer them onto a MIAT flight and if there are MIAT passengers travelling from Ulan Bator to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Airlines will collect them from these intermediate points and fly them to Malaysia.

At this initial stage, Dr Ling said it was not necessary for both airlines to fly the entire route.

Instead they should co-operate by transferring passengers from either Malaysia Airlines or MIAT.

"It is still a thin market. We should not compete with one another," he said.

When more people travel along this route, MAS and MIAT can then establish direct air links between the two countries.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's assistance is being sought to study the viability of building an inland port in land-locked Mongolia, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

He added that the request was made by Enkhasaikhan and agreed upon by Dr Mahathir during bilateral talks between the two this morning.

The inland port, Abdullah said, would help the northern Asian country immensely.

Mongolia is sandwiched between Russia and China and has no seaports.

An inland port, he said, would help strengthen the country's trade dealings with other countries and if Malaysia's assistance was direct and substantial, it would significantly enhance bilateral relations between the two nations.

He said the study would also look into the possibility of having a trans-Asian train service linking the inland port to other countries and major cities within the region.

The talks were held at the State Great Hural, the Mongolian Parliament House.

Before that Dr Mahathir and his delegation of ministers, senior civil servants and businessmen met with the chairman of the Mongolian Parliament, Gonchigdorj.

The two Prime Ministers also discussed ways to promote bilateral and trade relations including the training of more Mongolians in Malaysia.

Abdullah said Mongolians were especially keen to send their people to acquire new skills in the fields of electronics, geology and mining.

The two countries also agreed to work closely and to consult one another

on international issues.

Of particular interest to both was the reformation of the United Nations and the projects and activities conducted by the Non-Aligned Movement.

Abdullah said Mongolia also expressed its desire to work closely with the Asean Regional Forum as well as Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation.

"They have asked us to inform Asean, ARF and Apec on this and we will most certainly do so," he said.

Earlier in the day, both Prime Ministers witnessed the signing of the air services agreement, the agreement on economic, scientific, technical and cultural co-operation between the two government and the MOU on scientific and technical co-operation on palm oil application in Mongolia.

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