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Koh: New potential for Bayan Lepas airport

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PENANG, Thurs. - The Bayan Lepas International Airport here will continue to play an important role as a freight distribution hub even if the new regional international airport proposed to be built in Kedah materialises.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the Bayan Lepas airport would serve the Silicon Corridor stretching from Bayan Lepas to Prai and Kulim.

"This new potential and role for Bayan Lepas airport emerged over the last two to three months when several multi-national corporations operating in Penang proposed to set up their major freight distribution centres for Asia-Pacific in Penang," he said, when commenting on Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid's announcement on the new airport.

Sanusi said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had on Saturday faxed his approval from London for the proposed airport to be built on a man-made island off the Kuala Muda coast.

Speaking after witnessing the underwriting agreements for and launching the logo of Dana Mutiara Berhad today, Koh said the State Government was awaiting further direction and details from the Federal Government on the proposed new airport, and how it will complement the Bayan Lepas.

"We do not know yet if Bayan Lepas will continue to serve passengers after the one in Kuala Muda takes off," he said.

"However, because of Bayan Lepas' imminent role as a distribution hub for the electronics, computer and related industries, it is getting more congested and has to be upgraded and expanded as soon as possible."

Koh said this new need arose as a result of recent incentives for International Procurement Centre given by the Federal Government and the promotion of integrated manufacturing sector by Penang in the last two years.

"The role of the airport will be further enhanced as the second Penang Bridge has been planned to link Penang to the North-South highway through Juru," he said.

"In other words, even if the new proposed international airport materialises in the next three to five years, the Bayan Lepas International Airport will have an equally important role to play," he said.

Asked if the new proposed airport in Kuala Muda could adversely affect tourism to the State, Koh said that on the contrary, it might actually boost Penang's tourism.

"If fast speed water taxis and ferry services are established between the reclaimed island to the north of Penang directly to the Batu Ferringhi tourist belt, Georgetown and other locations, tourists can be brought to Penang directly from the proposed airport by sea," he added.

Koh said the State Government would give its input on this idea to the Federal Government as well.

He said he had been planning the expansion of Bayan Lepas International Airport and the location of the new regional airport within the State.

"Since 1991, I have actively lobbied for the airport and even offered two sites in Seberang Perai, one in Beram and then the Byram Estate near Nibong Tebal," he said.

"However as both Kedah and Perak State Governments were also lobbying for the new airport to be located in their respective States, the Northern Region Development Committee decided to leave the decision to the Prime

Minister and the Federal Government."

Koh said when Sanusi had discussed the new proposed airport with him about two-and-a-half months ago, he had viewed it positively and made it known that Penang was willing to work together with Kedah in having the new airport, modelled after Kansai International airport in Osaka, Japan, on reclaimed land near the border.

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