

27 JUN 1997

Ling-Taiwan

MALAYSIA AND TAIWAN AGREE IN PRINCIPLE ON OPEN SKIES PACT

KUALA LUMPUR, June 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Taiwan have agreed in principle to liberalise air travel between both countries, a week after Kuala Lumpur and Washington signed an open skies agreement.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the proposed open skies pact with Taiwan would increase passenger and cargo traffic from the two countries.

Malaysia has no political ties with Taiwan but is only engaged in trade and investment cooperation.

Dr Ling said the air pact was discussed with his Taiwanese counterpart during the June 22-24 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Transportation Ministerial Meeting in Victoria, Canada.

Speaking to reporters at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah airport here on his return from Canada, Dr Ling said similar arrangements are also being worked out with other countries.

The minister however declined to disclose the countries concerned, saying "it is too early".

When asked if the countries have given positive feedback, Dr Ling said Malaysia would negotiate with countries that are interested in open skies policy.

"Even if China is interested to have open skies pact with us, we will welcome that," he said while denying that Malaysia's arrangement with Taiwan would affect Kuala Lumpur's relations with Beijing.

On June 21, Dr Ling represented Malaysia in the signing of the open skies agreement with the United States in San Francisco after several months of negotiations by officials of both sides.

Dr Ling said today Malaysia would benefit from the proposed open skies pact with Taiwan because of Taiwan's thriving economy and its location.

Dr Ling also announced that the Lebanese government has agreed to allow Malaysia Airlines' Kuala Lumpur-Dubai-Beirut flight to be extended to cover Cairo.

The minister, who accompanied Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the West Asian country recently, said MAS has also been given a limited fifth freedom right by the Lebanese government.

The fifth freedom right would mean that the national carrier will be able to pick passengers from Beirut to go to Cairo.

At present, MAS flies twice weekly to Beirut via Dubai.

Malaysia, in return, will allow the Middle East Airlines, the Lebanese national carrier, to engage in a similar arrangement with Kuala Lumpur, said Dr Ling.

On the probe into the crash of the Agusta helicopter in which industrialist Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad and his wife were killed last March, Dr Ling said investigations are still on-going.

"The report will take some time because the (chopper's) engine was sent to the manufacturers (Pratt & Whitney)," he said.

Asked if the report on the crash would be made public, Dr Ling said the Cabinet will decide on it. -- BERNAMA

ES RM