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Malaysia wins extra landing rights in Japan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - A week before the Prime Minister's official visit to Japan, Malaysia has won extra landing rights to Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka, allowing an additional 900 passengers to travel weekly to the Land Of The Rising Sun.

Under the old agreement, Malaysia was entitled to nine weekly flights to Tokyo, Fukuoka (four), Nagoya (three) and Osaka (six), but the new agreement has allowed an additional flight to each destination.

The landing rights were successfully concluded yesterday during the two-day Malaysia-Japan Air Services Agreement talks between Transport Ministry officials and their Japanese counterparts.

Malaysia had already given Japan the maximum nine landing rights.

"Besides Japan, other foreign airlines have indicated their interest to increase their landing frequency to Malaysia," Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said today after his weekly Cabinet briefing.

Currently, Malaysia Airlines flies three times a week to Fukuoka, five times to Osaka and three times to Nagoya.

However, Dr Ling was non-committal when asked whether the new landing rights would be given exclusively to Malaysia Airlines.

"This," he said, "would be discussed by ministry officials and airline operators."

Besides Malaysia Airlines, two other local airlines Air Asia or Transmile, which fly regionally, also have a shot at the new landing rights.

"What is important now is to ensure that the new landing rights would be fully utilised by these three airlines," he said.

Dr Ling said the last review of the landing rights agreement was made in April, 1995 and was raised again during bilateral talks between visiting Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in early January.

Dr Ling also touched on the problems Malaysia is experiencing with Singapore on retaining ownership of the KTM Bhd land in Tanjung Pagar following the diplomatic row triggered by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

Asked if the row would affect on-going talks on the proposed relocation of the KTM land, Dr Ling's reply was frank.

"It will not be that cordial, at least for now," he said. "It is hoped that the situation will settle down to allow relations between the two countries to return to normal."

Dr Ling reiterated that the KTM land will continue to "stick" with Malaysia, as long as KTM runs the railway service to Tanjung Pagar.

This was provided under the Straits Railway Ordinance signed between Malaysia and Singapore when both nations were under British administration.

Malaysia has a 999-year lease on the valuable 16-ha Tanjung Pagar land besides owning another 200-ha in Singapore.

On Singapore's proposal to provide alternative land of equal value Tanjung Pagar, Dr Ling dwelled on the larger issue.

"If we shift, who pays?" he asked. "Furthermore, we do not want to be short-changed."

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