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More 'open skies' pacts sought

PETALING JAYA, Fri. - Following the recent signing of the "open skies" agreement with the United States, Malaysia is now seeking similar pacts with several other countries, including Taiwan.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said today that Taiwan had agreed in principle to sign such an agreement with Malaysia which would provide the airlines unlimited landing rights in both countries.

Dr Ling and his Taiwanese counterpart had discussed the possibility of signing the pact during last week's Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation Ministers of Transport meeting in Victoria, Canada.

"This will be another milestone because Taiwan is a thriving economy. It is good for the economy of both countries, for the people, for trade and investors.

"It will provide a great opportunity for Malaysian Airlines as well as all the other airlines in Taiwan," he told a Press conference at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport after arriving home from a working visit to Lebanon, the US and Canada.

Dr Ling said Taiwan would be another good intermediate point for MAS.

He said his ministry would work on the agreement immediately and hoped to complete the task in a month.

Malaysia, represented by Dr Ling, signed an "open skies" pact with the US on June 21 to liberalise air travel between both countries.

Dr Ling said the agreement was beneficial to MAS as it could now fly to any point within the US, without being constrained by limits otherwise stipulated in bilateral air agreements.

Prior to the US trip, Dr Ling had gone to Lebanon where he held talks with officials from the Middle East airlines.

He said Lebanon had agreed to allow MAS to extend its services to Cairo, Egypt.

"At present, MAS flies twice a week to Dubai and Beirut.

Lebanon will allow the fifth freedom rights for MAS to pick up passengers from Beirut to Cairo.

However, it will be subjected to a commercial agreement between the airlines.

The Minister also visited the Port of Abbas, Esfahan and Masshad to explore the possibility of increasing Malaysian exports to Iran and the Commonwealth of Independent States as suggested by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Ling said the Port of Abbas could be used as a point for Malaysian goods destined for Iran and the CIS.

"There is a piece of land to be leased there. It can be used as a launching pad. We will send a team to the Port of Abbas to look into this soon," he said.

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