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Opening of KLIA to be delayed (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The opening of the KL International Airport in Sepang for commercial operations has been delayed to "anytime within the first three months of next year" but after Jan 1, the date it was scheduled to be opened.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said today this was to ensure that everything was in order before it was opened.

He, however, maintained that work on the project proper was still on schedule and there was no delay in construction.

"I am satisfied with the progress of work at the airport. I would like to state here that there is no delay in the construction of the project.

"We only want to make sure that all aspects, from staff training to passenger and baggage handling and flight information systems, are synchronised well before we are ready for the opening," he said.

Last December, when visiting the project site, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said although there were some delays in several components of the project, he was confident that the airport would be operational by Jan 1, next year, as scheduled.

He said there were slight delays in a few aspects of the RM9 billion project but the percentage of facilities which were ahead of schedule was higher than those delayed.

In April this year, Dr Ling said he would visit the project site regularly to ensure it was completed on schedule. He said the Government could not afford any delay and wanted the airport to be ready for opening on Jan 1 next year.

It is understood that the KLIA, which is employing a state-of-the-art Total Airport Management System - a data network that interfaces and integrates various electronics systems and organisations through the exchange of information for efficient operation, may need some time to be implemented.

The basic TAMS operation is to integrate and centralise control of operations, security, engineering, crisis control and network management.

This includes information management, flight information display, baggage information, gate allocation, passenger check-in, air traffic management and airport operations.

Dr Ling today said Malaysia Airlines would however continue with its plans to carry out the first real-time flight test at the airport as scheduled in mid-September.

This, he said, was to enable it to check the time taken for its planes to land and taxi from the runway to the apron and hangar.

Dr Ling said this to reporters after launching a book, "The Multimedia Mosaic: Multimedia On the PC," at the Tunku Abdul Rahman College here.

The book was co-authored by Ken Neo and Neo Mai.

Present at the event were Dr Ling's wife, Datin Seri Ena Ling, the authors' father Datuk Neo Yee Pan, who was former MCA acting president, and TAR College principal Dr Ng Lay Swee.

Dr Ling said once the construction of the basic facilities was completed, Malaysia Airlines together with other agencies would carry out basic trials at the airport.

"The standard operating procedures are being drafted and so is classroom training for employees.

"From Sept 15, the employees will be given hands-on-training to

familiarise them with the equipment and new environment," he said.

Dr Ling said after the employees had been trained in their respective fields, the management would formulate ways to integrate these services to ensure all airport procedures were carried out accordingly.

He said in December, Malaysia Airlines would carry out advance trials to ensure the employees and airport were ready for the opening.

"We will carry out the advance trials until we are really satisfied that we are ready for the opening.

"Once these trials are completed, only then will we be able to give an exact date for the opening of the airport for commercial operations.

"We do not want to say we will open on Jan 1 next year when we cannot do so," he said.

Dr Ling said although all core and supporting facilities at the airport were expected to be completed as scheduled, the time needed to install imported equipment might take time.

"We will be buying equipment from Australia, Britain and the United States and many other countries. We have to make sure that all these equipment fit in nicely and will not disrupt operations later," he said.

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