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PM: Delay in KLIA completion not critical (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was made to understand that the delay in the construction of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang was not critical and that it would still be ready in time for the Commonwealth Games.

The Prime Minister said the airport would be opened in the first quarter of next year.

"I don't think it is very critical. It will be opened within the first quarter of next year. In fact, we are not having the Commonwealth Games in the first quarter of the year."

On whether he has been briefed on the problems affecting the airport's construction, Dr Mahathir said: "I will be going there on Aug 15 and I expect to be told of the problems then."

The Prime Minister was speaking after the launching of InterAsia Fairs and Exhibition Sdn Bhd and its website at Nikko Hotel.

He later witnessed the signing of an agreement on joint collaboration between InterAsia and Hannover Fairs Asia Pte Ltd.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the statement by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik last week that the opening of the airport, scheduled for Jan 1, had been delayed to "anytime within the first three months of next year".

He had said this was to ensure that everything was in order before it was opened.

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

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the dispute between Ekran Bhd and Asea Brown Boveri-CBPO consortium over the construction of the RM15 billion Bakun hydro-electric dam.

The Prime Minister reiterated that he was confident the dispute could be resolved.

"We are looking into it and I think we can resolve it, one way or another. The important thing is the Bakun project is still being built."

On whether Ekran had submitted its report on the dispute, Dr Mahathir said it had and the Government was studying the matter.

He was also asked to comment on talks that ABB now wanted the Government to be a guarantor for the project.

To this, Dr Mahathir said: "We can't stand as guarantor for something that we will have to invest in and we think is not safe ... we will do it if it is safe. So, we have to study first why Ekran is not happy with the contract."

In Kuala Terengganu, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the Government would ensure that work on the Bakun project was not affected by the dispute.

"We are monitoring the situation closely and hope the disputing parties can resolve the problem as soon as possible," he said when replying to questions from reporters concerning the latest development on the project.

Anwar had earlier opened the four-day National Farmers, Fishermen and Livestock Breeders Day celebration at Dataran Shahbandar.

"We hope the dispute can be resolved because the Government wants to see the construction of the dam to continue smoothly," he said.

Asked what the Government would do if the dispute between Ekran and ABB remained unsolved, Anwar said the Government would take the responsibility

to ensure work on the project continued.

Dr Mahathir had on July 31 said that while the Government would try to find a way to help solve the impasse, it would have to break the contract if the worst were to happen.

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