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Mahathir-NRIA

PULAU PINANG AIRPORT MAY BE CLOSED ON COMPLETION OF NRIA

JITRA, Aug 14 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the Bayan Lepas International Airport in Pulau Pinang may be closed when the Northern Region International Airport (NRIA) to be built in Kedah commences operations.

He said that this is due to the high cost of land in Pulau Pinang, constraining expansion plans to meet future demand.

"We foresee that in future, with increased economic growth, the airport in Pulau Pinang will no longer be able to meet a high demand.

"Without demand and without capacity for expansion, the Pulau Pinang Airport may be closed when the NRIA is operational," he told a news conference after meeting residents of the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency here.

He said the federal government felt that with the high price of land, expansion of the airport in Pulau Pinang would not be effective.

The burden of the high cost could be transferred elsewhere, he said.

The NRIA was approved by the federal government in June on an application by the Kedah government which plans to construct the airport on a 6,300-ha reclaimed land along the Kedah coast. The reclamation project is expected to commence end of the year.

As agreed by the state government, the NRIA project will be privatised to Samudera Baru Darul Aman Sdn Bhd and the construction concept will be based on the model of the Kansai International Airport in Osaka, also built on reclaimed land.

The state-of-the-art airport will be constructed in Kuala Muda. At present, the construction cost has not been estimated.

The Pulau Pinang government earlier submitted an application to build a new airport in the state but its application was rejected.

According to Dr Mahathir, the NRIA would be constructed as soon as the project's environmental impact assessment is completed.

He said that the NRIA would serve all the states in the northern region.

Dr Mahathir said that the federal government regards the NRIA as the catalyst for the development of Perak, Pulau Pinang, Kedah and Perlis although it is built in Kedah.

"In fact, Pulau Pinang will benefit greatly because the airport is situated close to the state and a bridge will be built to link the reclaimed area with Pulau Pinang," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that when Pulau Pinang applied to build a new airport in the state, the Perak and Kedah governments disagreed.

As such, he said, the government had to look for another place close to all the three states.

The Prime Minister also expressed regret that the opposition had used Pulau Pinang's failure to obtain approval as an issue to undermine the leadership of Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

"They will always try to undermine other people...to seek political mileage," he said. -- BERNAMA

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