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A world-class effort (HL)

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SEPANG, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport reflected the ability of Malaysians to build a world-class airport using futuristic technology and without damaging the environment.

The Prime Minister said the expertise acquired in managing the various contract packages, the large number of consultants and 25,000 workers from 50 countries, had given Malaysians invaluable practical experience and the ability to implement similar projects domestically and abroad.

As far as he could recall, there was no airport built on this scale within a limited time and budget.

"We should be proud of this achievement. To complete a massive project as this within a period of less than five years proves that we have the ability," he said at the grand opening of the RM9 billion KLIA by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar tonight.

Also present were the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Ministers and local and foreign dignitaries.

Dr Mahathir said KLIA was not just an airport, but a piece of art, dedicated to beauty as well as the environment.

"It relates to greenness and the forests of Malaysia, both inside and outside. It has not sacrificed function in order to achieve this. It has the very latest airport technology."

He said KLIA was expected to provide 30,000 jobs and be the nucleus of promoting trade and business with just the number of passengers and the public using the airport.

"Economic benefits expected to be derived from entry of new airline companies to KLIA and the increase in flight frequency would be substantial."

He said the Government would work hard to draw airline companies to the KLIA, using current investment incentives to attract suitable and strategic industries to operate in the surrounding area.

He, however, said it must be remembered that the sophisticated structure alone did not give it world-class status. Providing better services to passengers and airport users would.

The Prime Minister urged all those providing services and facilities related to KLIA to co-operate in ensuring that nothing "sub-standard" was found.

"Let there be no one who is too preoccupied with his own territory and powers which in the process jeopardises the services at the airport."

Dr Mahathir said the airport was built under full Malaysian management although the Government had initially wanted foreign prime contractors and construction management.

"We were told the construction of an airport this size would be very difficult and needed management of a very high calibre. But, due to a slight mishap, we decided not to entrust the construction management to foreigners."

Instead, the Government appointed a Public Works Department engineer who had never built anything like this before to manage the construction.

On the allocation of the large land area - 10,000 hectares - for the airport, he said this was because land and location were always a constraint in airport construction worldwide, and Malaysia was no

exception to this rule.

"Today, Subang handles 16 million passengers, that is 4,000 per cent more than expected and is still growing. But there is no room for expansion at Subang any more after only 33 years of operation.

"It would be unwise to build a new airport, with only a slightly bigger capacity. The KLIA is planned for six to seven times Subang's capacity eventually. Presently, the capacity is for 25 million passengers."

He said that in terms of area and capacity, the KLIA was mega, but in terms of cost, it was extremely cheap compared to similar airports now being built.

"I understand the new Hong Kong airport, without the road and bridge, cost US\$9 billion or about RM35 billion. This airport cost only RM9 billion and if we had not made the decision to build this airport long before the depreciation of the ringgit, we would not build it at all."

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