

30 JUN 1998

Mahathir-KLIA

EFFORTS BEING TAKEN TO IRON OUT PROBLEMS IN KLIA

KUALA LUMPUR, June 30 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today efforts are being taken to iron out problems which have cropped up on the first day of operation of the KL International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang, near here.

The prime minister said the problems included breakdowns in the communication system leading to flight delays, the check-in system which had to be done manually and airlines taking off without food supply for passengers.

Dr Mahathir, however, described the hiccups as "not very serious complications" and said all measures were being taken to rectify the situation.

"There were other new airports which, when they were opened, couldn't function at all," he told reporters after being briefed on the operation of the KLIA, upon his arrival from Langkawi.

The KLIA, which was officially opened by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tunku Ja'afar on Saturday, began its operation at 7am today with a Boeing 777 flight carrying Dr Mahathir, his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and MAS chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli to Langkawi.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, on behalf of his ministry, apologised to passengers who had missed their flights or had their flights delayed.

Dr Mahathir said the breakdown in the communication system started in the early morning, resulting in several departments being unable to communicate with each other.

"Because of that, there were delays in aircraft departure, food supply could not be made and there were flights which were not supplied with food.

"But all these, the faults have been identified and it is hoped that in an hour or two the communication will be resolved," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that due to the sheer size of the airport more signages would be installed to enable travellers to find their way around the airport more easily.

Guides would also be provided tonight to lead passengers to their respective departure gates, he said.

Asked whether there was any back-up system in the event of a communication breakdown, Prime Minister said: "There should be a back-up but what they had to do was to use their handphones."

Dr Mahathir said he had hoped that there would be no complications but he had all along suspected that they were bound to happen.

"So, when I was told that there was a call from Tajudin, I knew that there must be something wrong."

However, despite all the problems, Dr Mahathir said, he was told that aircraft were able to land and take-off, showing at the same time that the control tower was working as it should.

Tajudin, who was present, said less than 10 domestic and international flights were delayed by an average of an hour.

Dr Ling, at a separate news conference, said angry passengers personally came to him to complain about the problems they encountered such as having to wait some three to four hours for their baggage.

"There were passengers who were very angry because they came with high expectations," he said.

He said the various agencies were able to work together to ensure the

smooth running of the airport in a short period of time.

-- BERNAMA

MAM RAZ JK