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Expansion will enable passenger traffic to double

KOTA BARU, Fri. - The expansion work on the Sultan Ismail Petra Airport in Pengkalan Chepa will start this year, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said today.

Dr Ling, who did not disclose the cost of the project, said the expansion would enable the airport to handle up to 1.4 million passengers a year, more than double the present volume of 600,000 passengers.

He said the Government was still deciding on how the airport should be expanded - whether to just upgrade the existing facility or build a new one - as this hinged on the availability of funds.

"Whatever it is, we are going to expand the airport and the work should start this year," he told reporters on arrival at the airport for a State visit.

Dr Ling said the expansion plan had already been approved by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He added that the Government had always placed the convenience of the people first, irrespective of their political leanings.

According to Dr Ling, the volume of passengers at the airport had grown at about 11 per cent annually over the last 10 years.

He said the move to expand the airport also stemmed from complaints by passengers that the terminal building, particularly at the departure and arrival halls, had become too congested.

"A lot of people have complained about conditions at the airport including Barisan Nasional component parties," he said.

Asked about the Government's postponement of major construction projects as part of an austerity drive, Dr Ling said:

"I believe the needs and the convenience of the people are important. We may have to defer other projects (so as) to carry out this one."

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