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Parties must co-operate to iron out teething problems at KLIA

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AT the break of dawn, the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang came alive with passengers and well-wishers stepping for the first time into the RM9 billion ultra-modern airport.

Malaysians who set their eyes on the magnificent building generally gave the thumbs up to the country's latest development project, which was completed in just five short years.

Even foreigners who arrived on various international flights were clearly impressed by the scenic beauty of the airport, dubbed The Airport In The Forest, The Forest In The Airport.

The beauty of the building aside, the custodians of this splendid modern structure have still to make adjustments and corrections to the operational flaws uncovered on the first day of operations.

KLIA critics may be harsh in their comments following the breakdown of some of its functions yesterday, but the management of KLIA, Malaysia Airports Berhad and Malaysia Airlines should not be disheartened.

They should instead accept the criticisms as a challenge.

Like true pioneers, they were bold and brave in taking up the challenge of innovation, with the sole intention of providing the "best of the best" to passengers passing through the KLIA.

KLIA had introduced the Total Airport Management System, which centralises all computer-based operations in the airport, making it the first of its kind in the world.

Of course, as in every new venture, there are the inevitable hiccups in the system. Nothing is perfect. As time goes by, the airport authorities will certainly not only have these flaws corrected, but also improve on the system.

In the process, unfortunately, the public had to suffer hardship. While they may be angry, it should be noted that these problems were not intentional but part of the process of providing better services.

It is also important for the various custodians of the airport, particularly Malaysia Airports and the national carrier, Malaysia Airlines, to work closely to ensure the airport and flight services run smoothly.

No one particular party can claim that they can single-handedly enhance KLIA's image as a world-class airport. All quarters must set aside whatever differences they may have for the sake of KLIA.

It will not augur well for KLIA if these two parties are highly critical of each other. For sure, it will not be beneficial to the new airport's operations.

Reporters covering the pre- and post-opening operations of the airport had been bombarded with complaints from airlines' employees against Malaysia Airports, and vice-versa, whenever something went wrong.

Perhaps Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had this in mind when he said, in his speech at the airport's opening the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar on Saturday:

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

Certainly, neither side will gain from the outcome of a cold war. Indeed, both will be made to bear the blame if anything goes wrong at the airport, regardless of the problems.

One also cannot help but wonder whether adequate attempts were made to

give as much publicity as possible to the opening of the airport, particularly outside the country.

Indeed, foreign journalists and aviation magazine writers were noticeably absent during the opening, said a Malaysia Airlines colleague. If this was true, it was indeed a wasted opportunity as their strong presence could help promote the airport internationally.

One cannot help but admire the discipline and dedication of the Malaysia Airports employees, including the security guards who carried out their jobs efficiently. Unfortunately, newsmen and photographers ran into many problems when their jobs were obstructed simply because the guards were carrying out their duties.

Imagine the hardship faced by reporters wearing Malaysia Airports-issued passes and press armbands which were not recognised by its own security personnel. This happened when reporters were covering the Prime Minister's visit to witness the transfer of equipment from the Sultan Abdul Aziz International Airport to KLIA.

It took the newsmen some time to persuade the guards to allow through security checks. Ironically, even Malaysia Airports personnel were confused by the action of their own security guards.

But, these are mere minor flaws which can be easily corrected. It's more important for Malaysia Airports to make the airport an important business hub for the nation.

Certainly, it cannot fulfil this task alone. It needs the help of others, including the various airline companies operating at the airport and the mass media to provide sufficient publicity.

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