

31/03/1998

KLIA heading for late June opening

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SEPANG, Mon. - Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik today hinted that the opening date of the RM9 billion Kuala Lumpur International Airport could be sometime in late June.

He said the airport's systems would undergo advance integrated trials for two months beginning May to ensure complete durability and reliability.

Dr Ling's comments indicate that the airport's opening date, which had previously been delayed twice, could be scheduled for late June.

The Cabinet had decided on March 11 that the KLIA would be opened to commercial flights in June, although no official date had been announced.

The Cabinet also endorsed the opening of KLIA to chartered flights beginning May.

However, Dr Ling stressed that the final decision on the KLIA's opening date would be made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Speaking to reporters after a briefing on the airport's development progress by KLIA Berhad and Malaysia Airports Berhad officials, Dr Ling said the basic infrastructure of the airport would be completed in April.

"April would be a very critical month. The various parties involved in the airport's development have assured the fullest co-operation and maximum utilisation of skillful manpower to complete whatever basic infrastructure that is still not in place."

He said following this, all airport management systems, including the Baggage Handling System and the Flight Information Display System, would be tested simultaneously for the first time.

"Basic testing of the systems has been conducted on an individual basis for the last five months," he said.

"But we want to make sure that the systems can work together and these tests will allow us to identify interfacing problems and rectify them before the airport's opening."

Dr Ling said details on the advance trials would be announced later by Malaysia Airports Berhad and KLIAB.

On whether there would be no more delays to the KLIA's opening, Dr Ling said: "I can't say that. Only God can make such a promise."

Malaysia Airports Berhad's managing director Datuk Khairuddin Ibrahim said the first advance trials would be on May 5 involving about 1,000 volunteers.

Khairuddin said a team from Malaysia Airports Berhad had observed tests at the new Chap Lek Kok International Airport in Hong Kong on Saturday and would be using the experience to monitor the tests at KLIA.

"However, the Chap Lek Kok International Airport is different because it does not cater to any domestic flights."

Khairuddin also said that so far 444 basic trials had been conducted at KLIA since Sept 16 last year.

He added that KLIA could not open without the advance trials and because of this, the previous scheduled opening in April would have been "impossible to meet."

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