

09/06/1998

PM confident KLIA will be opened on schedule

Kamarul Yunus; Sreerema Banoo

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is confident the KL International Airport in Sepang will be opened on schedule.

Speaking to reporters after a two-hour tour of the new airport yesterday, he said he had several private visits a few weeks earlier, and he was worried that the airport might not be able to be completed on time.

After the tour, Dr Mahathir described the progress of the airport as "good, the quality high, and the total airport management systems did not pose problems."

The Prime Minister toured the main terminal building, the satellite building and the "Bunga Raya" complex, a special arrival and departure complex for the VVIPs.

He was given a briefing on the operations of the airport by KLIA Bhd, the company overseeing the construction of the airport.

He congratulated KLIA Bhd for completing the construction of the airport within a short period. The company took four years for the airport to be completed - one year for earthworks and three years for building construction.

The earth works of the airport project, which was undertaken on a build-operate-transfer concept, commenced in 1995. The Prime Minister himself officiated at the ground breaking ceremony of the first package of the construction of the main terminal building on March 27 that same year.

He described this as a record of sort, explaining that it would require quite considerable management skills to manage such a large and complex development that required 25,000 workers and more than 300 contracts.

Following the completion of the new airport, Dr Mahathir said the country has succeeded in developing expertise for future construction of major projects.

Dr Mahathir also said there was no compromise on the quality of the construction in spite of the short time it took to complete the airport.

"You can see for yourself, the quality is very good, construction work is very good, the finish is very good and the designs are very innovative," he said, adding that the furniture, which were locally made, are also of good quality. In fact, he said, "practically everything is local."

On complaints that signages at the airport are too small, Dr Mahathir said adjustments have been made earlier to the signages but stressed that the relevant authorities will make corrections if there is a need for them to do so.

"I had received comments on that matter and adjustments were made earlier but there is still dissatisfaction. If that (signages) is not good enough, we will make corrections ... we are open to criticisms," he said.

On the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang, Dr Mahathir said it will not be left idle as the Royal Malaysian Air Force base is situated there.

"Other than that, the airport will also be used for servicing and repairs ... we may also use the airport for general aviation and others relating to aviation such as handling the Tabung Haji flights," he added.

Asked if he was satisfied with the fares for public transport to the new airport, Dr Mahathir said: "For the time being, there is going to be a lot of complaints, but one has to remember that when one upgrades a certain thing, we have to pay a higher price."

"There is no way we can afford to have better facilities but (at the) same price. In Malaysia, we always want better things but we want to pay less," he said, adding that this is "a bit difficult".

On suggestions that it would cost a taxi passengers more to go from Kuala Lumpur to the airport than taking the taxi from Kuala Lumpur to Ipoh, Dr Mahathir said they can then travel by road. "There is no point really, travelling south 60 miles in order to go north ... that is why we built good roads," he said.

(END)