

27 JUN 1998

KLIA-Opening

SPECTACULAR OPENING FOR MALAYSIA'S WORLD CLASS AIRPORT

KUALA LUMPUR, June 27 (Bernama) -- Under a blaze of fireworks and the pounding of drums, Malaysia's world-class KL International Airport (KLIA) was officially opened in Sepang near here today.

In a gala night time ceremony staged outside the main terminal building, Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar declared open the RM9 billion airport that will commence operation on Tuesday.

A Malaysia Airlines (MAS) Boeing 777 roared down one of the two runways of the 10,000 hectare airport to symbolise the inaugural landing at the ultra-modern airport.

The two-hour ceremony was witnessed nationwide by millions of Malaysians via a live telecast over RTM 1.

Also present were Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who took a personal interest in KLIA, the largest ever construction job undertaken by Malaysia this century.

Among the 1,400 guests were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Cabinet ministers, top government officials and foreign dignitaries, Malaysia Airports Berhad chairman Tan Sri Haji Basir Ismail and KL International Airport Berhad (KLIAB) executive chairman Tan Sri Clifford Herbert.

KLIA will replace the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah (SAAS) airport in Subang as the main gateway into Malaysia at 7am Tuesday morning. The SAAS airport will cease operations at 12.45 am after 33 years of service.

Dubbed the "airport of the 21st century" due to its state-of-the-art facilities and savvy technology, the commission of KLIA is a source of pride for Malaysia.

It was completed in four and the half years of round-the-clock construction with a workforce that reached 25,000 at its peak, taking less than half the time normally required to complete an airport of its design, engineering and sophistication.

The airport, among the biggest in the world, was undertaken as a "fast track project" by KLIAB, a wholly-owned by the Malaysian government.

It will be managed by MAB which manages 37 airports in the country including five international airports.

The airport is 50km south of the capital and strategically located within Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor. It is electronically linked to Putrajaya, the Federal Government's new high-tech administration capital, and its twin "intelligent" city, Cyberjaya which are also located in the MSC.

The opening ceremony began with the "doa" (prayers) conducted by Federal Territory Mufti Datuk Dr Hashim Yahya.

Tuanku Ja'afar fitted a replica of the airport control tower into a model of a globe to signify the opening of the environmental-friendly airport that is among the largest in the world.

Soon after that, the B777 touched down with 150 "special passengers", villagers from five kampungs around Sepang courtesy of MAS..

The villagers were treated to a half-day tour of KL Tower and the Commonwealth Games Village in Bukit Jalil before flying home from the SAAS airport on the B777, the latest addition to the MAS fleet.

The air over the former rubber and palm oil plantation site was filled with the throbbing sounds from a Kompleks Budaya Negara drum troupe playing

the Malay kompang and rebana, Chinese giant drum and the Indian tabla.

This was followed by a 10-minute spectacular firework display that was watched by the guests from inside the main terminal building.

Based on a "forest in the airport, airport in the forest" theme, KLIA is designed as an environment-friendly airport. The airport itself is set against a natural habitat in which there is a major wetland nature park.

Some half a million native Malaysian forest trees, plants and shrubs of 400 species have been landscaped into 120 hectares of the airport area. Among the trees are the Sentang, Merawan Jantan and Keruing variety.

Upon opening, KLIA will have a capacity to handle 25 million passengers, almost twice that of the SAAS airport, and one million tonnes of cargo a year.

Under future phases of development, KLIA will ultimately handle 100 million passengers annually and have four runways.

A Formula One racing track is being constructed close to the airport and is scheduled to be ready for its first world race in 1999.

-- BERNAMA

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