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Aviation industry working closely to tackle Y2K bug

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AN INCREDIBLE amount of work has gone into making sure that air travel remains safe at the turn of the millennium and if there is one area which falls short of expectations it is that this is not adequately communicated to the public, says an industry official.

Aviation industry participants have responded responsibly by working closely together to tackle the so-called Y2K bug, Airports Council International Pacific Region (ACI-Pacific) president George Bellew said yesterday.

"They are working very hard on ensuring to the greatest extent possible that their computer systems make a smooth switchover," he said at a news briefing in Subang on next week's Ninth ACI-Pacific Assembly and Conference.

ACI-Pacific represents over 160 airports and 53 airport-related businesses in the Pacific Rim region.

Most of the region's airports, the KL International Airport included, are conducting simulations and tests which represent various possible responses in the event of a Y2K incident, said Bellew who is also chief executive of Christchurch International Airport Ltd.

"In addition, the International Air Transport Association, for example, has spent some US\$30 million (US\$1 = RM3.80) on its audit survey of airlines' Y2K readiness," he said.

In any case, because of the different time zones, many airports in the region will have the benefit of having several hours' lead time to act if something does go wrong, Bellew said.

The Christchurch airport, one of the first to undergo the transition, is working with ACI-Pacific to devise a mechanism to relay its experience immediately to airports in the rest of the world, he added.

The Y2K problem in fact has a positive side in that airport operators now recognise the benefits of cooperation, Bellew said.

On precautionary measures which may be taken, he said some countries may stop selected airlines from flying into their airports, and in extreme cases may suspend all flights on December 31.

Also present at the news briefing was Malaysia Airports Bhd managing director Datuk Khairuddin Ibrahim who said airports are no longer just an exit and entry point for travellers, but also have become a destination in their own right.

"We are currently developing a number of facilities to complement the attractions of the new airport. This is part of efforts to develop the area into a major recreational draw," he said.

The Ninth ACI-Pacific Assembly and Conference will be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tomorrow. It will feature some 20 international speakers, including the designer of KLIA, Mr Kisho Kurokawa, Pacific Asia Travel Association chief executive Joseph McInerney and Malaysia Airlines executive vice-president Datuk Bashir Ahmad.

The three-day event is themed "Next Generation Airports".

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