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Kadir-Flight

MAS SET TO GET MORE LANDING RIGHTS IN SAUDI

By: Mohd Rizal Razalli

JEDDAH, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- The Saudi Arabian government has agreed in principle to give more landing rights to Malaysia Airlines (MAS), a move seen as pertinent to support the expected growth in number of Saudi travellers to Malaysia in the near term.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said Saudi Arabia's Deputy Prime Minister (II) Prince Sultan Abdul Aziz had agreed to speed up processing of Malaysia's application to increase MAS flights to the Jeddah International Airport.

MAS now operates twice weekly on the Kuala Lumpur-Jeddah-Kuala Lumpur sector.

"Prince Sultan has promised me to personally intervene in this matter by liaising with the Saudi Department of Civil Aviation for a fast-track process approval," Abdul Kadir told Bernama today after paying a courtesy call here on Prince Sultan Abdul Aziz, who is also the Defence Minister.

Abdul Kadir, who is leading a tourism promotion mission to Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, said the prince welcomed Malaysia's move to increase the number of flights to Jeddah as this would give more Saudis an opportunity to visit Malaysia.

This was an endorsement of the Saudi government's decision to fully support efforts to promote Malaysia as the premier tourist destination among the Saudi people, he said.

Abdul Kadir said the prince had full confidence in Malaysia's tourism industry and would support any tourism projects and activities done in that country.

"I have also informed the prince about Malaysia's bold plan to carry out aggressive and grand promotional efforts in Saudi Arabia, with the help of their tour agents and operators," he said.

He said the number of Malaysians who visited Saudi Arabia far outstripped the flow of Saudi travellers into Malaysia, and this needed to be balanced.

"While about 100,000 to 200,000 Malaysians visit Saudi Arabia to perform the haj and umrah every year, the number of Saudi travellers to Malaysia is much smaller at only between 12,000 and 15,000 people every year," he said.

Abdul Kadir also said he briefed the prince on political and economic developments in Malaysia and the effective measures taken to tackle the situation.

"We told them that on the economic front we have recovered and our country is turning around quickly. On the political front, the National Coalition (BN) is putting greater efforts to make sure of a landslide victory in the coming general election," Abdul Kadir said.

Abdul Kadir also said he reiterated the official invitation of the government of Malaysia, made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad previously, to Prince Sultan Abdul Aziz to visit Malaysia.

"The prince replied by saying he will find the most suitable time to visit Malaysia as soon as possible," he said.

Earlier, Abdul Kadir paid a courtesy call on Saudi Arabia's Finance and National Economy Minister Dr Ibrahim Al Assof.

Dr Ibrahim said later that they discussed bilateral relations and cooperation in the tourism field.

Dr Ibrahim also expressed Saudi Arabia's support for Malaysia's

economic recovery measures, including selective exchange controls.

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RIZ YBY