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Domestic air fare still 'one of the cheapest'

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - The domestic air fare charged by Malaysia Airlines is still among the cheapest in the region even after the 51.8 per cent increase announced yesterday, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"MAS's fare is one-third of Garuda's (the Indonesian national carrier) domestic air fare. We are charging such a cheap rate."

The government does not mind charging lower fares for the poor and this explained why there was no air fare increase for MAS flights to Sabah and Sarawak.

It was also convinced that the people would still fly MAS even if fares had gone up, Dr Mahathir told reporters after chairing the 11th National Information Technology Council meeting at his office here.

"It is nowhere near the domestic rate charged in other countries," he was quoted as saying by Bernama.

Since MAS was incurring huge losses, "it was not fair to ask a commercial entity to subsidise the people ... the government should subsidise," he said.

If the Government was no longer the owner of MAS, those owning it or have invested in the carrier would definitely not subsidise the fare.

"So people should realise that in Malaysia charges are all very cheap, even the toll rates are cheap. In Malaysia we want the best of everything but we want to pay third class rate."

The cabinet at its meeting yesterday approved the higher fare but left it to MAS to decide on the effective date.

On the proposed amendment to the Federal Constitution during the current Parliament sitting, the Prime Minister indicated that it would only be a routine exercise without bringing about any radical changes.

"We want to make sure that voter registration is clear-cut without any confusion and they are accepted by all," he said.

The government rejected automatic voter registration for those reaching the age of 21 because such a move would only leave room for a lot of phantom voter allegations.

Umno Youth has also called on MAS to provide efficient and high quality service following the fare increase.

Umno Youth executive council member Subahan Kamal said: "When one pays a higher price, it is natural for one to expect better service.

"It is MAS's responsibility to ensure there are no more complaints from the public on its service."

There had been numerous complaints from the public about the level of service provided by MAS.

These included frequent changes in the departure and arrival times, losses or delays in the arrival of baggage.

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