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MAHATHIR-MAS

MALAYSIA AIRLINES WILL FIND FOREIGN STRATEGIC PARTNER, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia Airlines will find foreign strategic partners to strengthen its performance.

However, he said no deadline has been set for the setting up of the strategic alliance.

Malaysia Airlines is currently having talks with several foreign airlines.

"We are talking to a lot of airlines at the moment. I'm quite sure we (will) find the strategic partners," he told reporters after opening the 50th PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) annual conference, here today.

Asked on the stand taken by several airlines to discontinue their flights to KL International Airport (KLIA), the prime minister said although the airlines have stopped flying to Kuala Lumpur, the number of passengers coming through had increased.

"They have their own problems and we can appreciate that. There are three major airports competing here, Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. So, some of them prefer just to come to Singapore and then shuttle to KL.

"We would prefer that they come to KL and shuttle to Singapore, but anyway, we are not losing out and we will go ahead to promote KLIA," said Dr Mahathir.

Qantas, Ansett Australia and Lufthansa stopped flying to KLIA since 1999, while British Airways, Aeroflot and All Nippon Airways will do the same this month.

Despite the temporary setback, there has been no reduction in the number of passenger arrivals to KLIA.

It was reported that passenger arrivals improved 5.2 percent to 13.2 million in 1999, and rose further by 11.8 percent to 14.7 million in 2000. The average growth in passenger traffic is expected to hover around seven percent in the next few years.

Dr Mahathir said that the government will continue to promote KLIA.

"We will meet the airlines people and ask them what we can do for them. They can put up a wish-list for us and we (will) try to meet all their wishes," he said.

Since the 1997 regional financial crisis, Malaysia Airlines had been incurring losses.

The national carrier incurred a RM451.6 million unaudited loss for the third financial quarter ended Dec 31 2000, as compared to a loss of RM225.9 million in the same quarter a year earlier.

For the cumulative period ended Dec 31 2000, the unaudited loss amounted to RM843 million from a profit of RM61 million registered in the same period in 1999.

During the period under review, the airline registered a higher turnover of RM2.301 billion against RM2.132 billion in the previous corresponding period, while for the cumulative period, the group registered a RM6.875 billion turnover against RM5.942 billion in the corresponding period in 1999. -- BERNAMA

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