

## **Air traffic control flop: PKR wants gov't to explain**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**Sept 21, 2012**

**By Hazlan Zakaria**

The Kuala Lumpur Air Traffic Control Centre reportedly went blind last week, suffering "total failure in the system with no radar, no radio frequencies", putting airborne planes and passengers at risk as there was no guidance from ground air traffic controllers.

This was revealed by opposition party PKR today.

Party leaders showed the press what they claimed are copies of the Department of Civil Aviation's (DCA) system log and interim report by the systems maintenance contractor on the alleged 2.50 am crisis on Sept 12.

"In the aviation industry where safety is a zero defect matter, even a near miss like this is equivalent to a total disaster," PKR vice-president Tian Chua warned.

He said this at a press conference in front of the Kuala Lumpur Air Traffic Control Centre in Subang, this morning.

The incident report issued by the systems maintenance contractor blamed faulty and obsolete circuit breakers that tripped the entire system.

The power failure rendered inoperable the air traffic center's radar system, which monitors aircraft in its sector, as well as radio communications it used to issue instructions to the planes.

The documents reported that the backup radar and radio systems also failed to come online and that the backup power and uninterruptable power supply (UPS) also failed.

Incompetent technicians?

According to the system log, overflight control for all aircraft in area controlled by the Kuala Lumpur Air Traffic Control Center had to be passed to the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) airforce base at Butterworth, while local departures were halted and inbound international traffic from nearby Changi, Don Mueng and Soekarno-Hatta international airports had to be refused for the one hour and fifteen minutes of the system failure.

Former RMAF operations director Brigadier General (retired) Abdul Hadi Abdul Khattab, who was also at the press conference today, said that based on his experience with air traffic control systems, such an incident "is highly dangerous" as it puts planes under control of the air traffic control center at risk of in-air collisions and running out of fuel.

He described that planes waiting to land in air traffic control zones are instructed to fly in a pre-defined circuit or "tracks" sometimes one after the other.

Each track are then stacked one on top of the other with planes arranged on different altitudes or height.

Such a delicate balance, he cautioned, must be orchestrated carefully by ground control to ensure the safety of all involved.

He is also skeptical that the entirety of the critical system could be taken down by faulty wiring or circuit breakers.

"Are their technicians so incompetent?" the former air force staff officer asked.

The party is calling for answers from the DCA and the Transport Ministry on how such a near disaster could have taken place.

"And now one of our biggest fears have come true with the total failure of the system that was only supposed to - according to the DCA - encounter minor glitches," lamented fellow party vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar.

'Were contracts given to inadequate crony companies?'

PKR wants the government and the DCA to answer:

How could such a critical system not be coupled with reliable and redundancy backups.

Why the main power, UPS and other backup power all failed at the same time.

What will the Transport Ministry and the DCA do to prevent a recurrence of such serious mishaps.

Another PKR vice-president, N Surendran questioned if the failures were the result of technically incompetent crony companies being given contracts despite being inadequately qualified for the job.

PKR had been attacking what they claimed was substandard air traffic control system being used by the DCA from direct award contracts, which they claimed benefits a crony company owned by the family of a minister-level federal official.

Last week's alleged total system failure at the air traffic control facility underscored their fears and punctuated their claims.

When contacted over the matter, DCA director-general Azharuddin Abdul Rahman reserved comments until he has looked into the incident and considered PKR's allegations.