

PM wants Melaka to promote new airport
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has asked the state government to formulate strategies to promote the new Melaka International Airport (LTAM) as the main gateway for visitors from the neighbouring country and optimise its usage.

Speaking when opening the airport in Batu Berendam in Melaka, he said the airport had modern facilities to attract tourists, including medical tourists, and investors.

"This is the advantage of having an airport. There will be an increase in the number of visitors and investors while medical tourism will also see an upturn," he said.

Najib, who is on a one-day visit to the state, had earlier arrived on a special aircraft at the airport, which the Melaka government aimed to turn into a hub for medical tourism.

The prime minister said that among aspects which the state government should focus on was connectivity by attracting more airlines such as Malaysia Airlines, Firefly and AirAsia to operate from there.

New destinations, such as Medan in Indonesia, should also be identified, he added.

Among the earliest airlines to operate at the airport was Indonesia's Riau Airlines, serving the Pekan Baru-Melaka sector.

Najib said the "Melaka" brand was renowned internationally due to its historical heritage.

Developing modern elements such as the LTAM would further put Melaka prominently on the global map, he said, adding that the aviation sector had a huge multiplying effect, to the tune of 12.5 times.

"Imagine how huge the spin-off would be if we can bring in a million visitors (through the LTAM). That is why we should work on promoting this facility," he said.

He called on the state government to work closely with the Tourism Ministry not only in terms of putting in place the necessary facilities but also to optimise the airport's usage.

At a news conference later at Seri Bendahara after meeting Melaka BN leaders, Najib was asked on the Melaka government's proposal that the RM60 million loan from the federal government to upgrade the airport be converted into assistance.

"We'll see," Najib replied, adding that what was important was to increase the number of flights operating from the airport.

"We will discuss this with the chief minister and I have one or two ideas on how to increase the number of flights here," he said.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam said the LTAM would become among the busiest airports in Malaysia as there were also non-commercial flights operating there run by the Malaysian Flying Academy.

Last year, the airport handled 23,751 passengers, he said in his speech at the airport's

opening.

Mohd Ali said medical tourism was among the most prominent among the 12 sub-sectors introduced by Melaka, recording an entry of 70,815 patients in 2008 and 51,511 last year.

He said a total of 67,175 of the patients in 2008 were from Indonesia.

Medical tourism receipt from Indonesia last year was RM135 million, he said, adding that the republic's Lion Air was expected to operate from LTAM from March.

- *Bernama*

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