

Public grows weary of AirAsia-MAHB dispute
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SEPANG, Dec 8 — Malaysians appear to be tiring of the increasingly acrimonious spat between Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB) and Asia's biggest budget carrier AirAsia, with most suggesting both parties stop washing their dirty linen in public.

Over the past week, the airport operator and its biggest client have traded barbs in the press and on social media networks, with each blaming the other for new budget terminal KLIA2's bloated cost.

AirAsia has also embarked on a campaign to get members of the public to lobby MAHB for low airport taxes following a rate hike late last month, which critics have linked to the now estimated RM3.9 billion KLIA2, nearly double its initial RM2 billion price tag.

But while almost all passengers at LCCT here felt it was better to put a freeze on airport tax increases, few thought it wise for AirAsia to air its grievances publicly and for MAHB to respond in kind.

The budget carrier's campaign to draw public attention to the airport tax also appears to have unwittingly thrown into sharp relief its own array of additional charges, which some have criticised as unwarranted.

Foo, 61, said AirAsia and MAHB should go back to the negotiating table and try to meet in the middle so that both parties can arrive at a fair deal.

"I'm a businessman so I think both sides should compromise... Why not both parties sit down and talk?" he told The Malaysian Insider.

But Foo, who flies on AirAsia three times a month, also said the airline should look at the surcharges it levies on passengers if it truly wished to keep flying affordable for all.

Hashim Kassim from Kota Kinabalu, also a businessman, said he supported AirAsia's campaign to keep airport tax low as any increase would be passed to customers of the airline.

But the 44-year-old said there must be some give-and-take between AirAsia and MAHB, pointing out that it would be "bad for them" if the current dispute dragged on.

IT business analyst Jonathan Yee, 45, said he was unhappy with both the airport tax hike and AirAsia's surcharges, saying he had no option but to accept them.

"As passengers, we feel helpless because we have not much choice. Even if we protest, what can be done?" he said while waiting for his flight to Ho Chi Minh City.

Yee, who hails from Kuala Lumpur, said increasing airport tax did not make much sense as facilities at LCCT remained the same but also questioned the credit card convenience fee charged by AirAsia.

"Sometimes I want to ask, what do you mean by convenience fee?" he said.

Nesh Kumar, 31, a sales executive, said he was opposed to the tax hike but did not wish to pick sides as both AirAsia and MAHB were Malaysian companies.

"I don't support any side... We are 1 Malaysia, so we have to support in the middle," he stressed.

The public finger-pointing between the two parties began when AirAsia boss Tan Sri Tony Fernandes rubbished MAHB's justifications for the increased cost of KLIA2 on micro-blogging site Twitter on November 29.

The new terminal's cost has nearly doubled to RM3.9 billion from RM2 billion after MAHB decided to raise passenger per annum (PPA) capacity to 45 million from 30 million, in line with AirAsia's internal growth projections.

AirAsia has denied lobbying for a larger terminal despite projecting that PPA will hit 45.3 million by 2020, noting that it had only asked MAHB to ensure KLIA2 could be expanded if needed.

KLIA2 will be the world's largest low-cost carrier terminal when it is completed in April 2013, six months behind the original schedule.

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