

**MAS Must Pay Penalty To Sabah, Says Bumiputera Chamber Of Commerce
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By Newmond Tibin**

KOTA KINABALU, Jan 4 (Bernama) -- Malaysia Airlines (MAS) must pay a customary penalty to Sabah following the carrier's recent abrupt move to suspend flights from the state capital to various international destinations, says Sabah Bumiputera Chamber of Commerce.

Its treasurer, Roselan Johar Mohamed, described the recent decision by the national carrier as "very sad and a complete departure from the role model they were suppose to assume".

"If it is deemed necessary to reduce unprofitable routes within East Malaysia, then MAS must pay customary penalty or "sogit to Sabah and Sarawak...after all we are the affected ones," he told Bernama here.

Roselan, who is also BIMP-EAGA Business Council (Sabah Chapter) chairman, was commenting on the suspension of MAS flights between Kinabalu-Osaka from Jan 6 and Kota Kinabalu-Perth from Jan 31 which threatened to jeopardise the state's tourism industry.

The national carrier will also suspend its Kota Kinabalu-Haneda flights from Feb 1 and Kota Kinabalu-Seoul flights from Feb 21 as part of its rationalisation plan.

Roselan said over the years MAS has garnered a decent proportion of the population as its followers.

"They are faithful and have always believed in MAS as the integrator of the people of Malaysia.

"The people had the chance to use other airlines and yet they still chose to travel onboard MAS. When we fly MAS, the ringgit stays in Malaysia and if we use a competitor, our ringgit will go overseas and our balance of payment will be affected.

"MAS should have considered all these factors, as well as, its corporate responsibility when making a decision. A drastic decision today may well be regretted in the future," he added.

Roselan said cutting unprofitable routes is not the answer to profitability, but "it is how one perceives your operations should be run. MAS may be older but never wiser. MAS will have a lot to learn from AirAsia".

Asked on the request for routes and landing rights to be handed over to Sabah Air upon the cessation of MAS flights to these destinations, Roselan said:"In this case, it's Sabah Air. Their expressed interest is very timely and it augured well for Sabah.

"Of course, I would go one step further to suggest that they ply routes with least competition, at least for the time being, to get the right feel.

"Air-transport is a capital intensive investment and the bottom line is reflective of who is running it. Our Bumiputera Chamber has every confidence that Sabah Air's Datuk Yusuf

Kassim would be able to take the lead," he said.

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