

AirAsia: 'Not being difficult on purpose'

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By Chan Quan Min

AirAsia is holding firm in refusing to move its operations from the low-cost carrier terminal (LCCT) to klia2 by March 9 2014 and urged prime minister Najib Abdul Razak to intervene.

In the airline's second statement within 24 hours, CEO Aireen Omar reiterated, "we are more than ready to move to klia2 but we must move under the right circumstances."

Aireen hinted at her unhappiness with Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) for not addressing concerns of "functionality, safety & security of klia2 which are paramount to our staff... and passengers."

"We are trying our level best to resolve all pending and pressing issues – as we have done for the past three years – with MAHB so that we can proceed to move to our new home accordingly. We still feel there is a need for the regulator to be independent as other industries in Malaysia," Aireen said.

MAHB general manager of corporate planning Randhill Singh earlier today told the online news portal Rakyat Post that "the truth of the matter is AirAsia is not ready to move. It is not because their demands are not being met or (there are) safety concerns."

Singh further added MAHB was working with AirAsia to work out a solution.

When contacted today MAHB could not confirm the deputy transport minister Abdul Aziz Kaprawi's order to close the LCCT by March 9 purportedly to force all airlines to move to klia2 one week after its scheduled opening date of May 2.

"It might be perceived that AirAsia is deliberately not moving to klia2 or being difficult on purpose, but I can assure you that is not our intention," said Aireen brushing off claims AirAsia is not prepared for the move.

"We are ready and committed to make the best out of klia2 although it is not the design we wanted, and no longer a fully low-cost carrier terminal as initially promised by MAHB," she added.

The cost of construction for the new terminal building has ballooned tremendously to RM4 billion from an initial budget of RM1.7 billion in 2007 on major design changes and cost overruns.

Most notably, several of the major changes to the layout of klia2 can be traced back to AirAsia's demands for a larger terminal building to contain its hub-and-spoke operations as revealed by KiniBiz in a June 2013 article.

The terminal building has been delayed more than two-and-a-half years late on five separate occasions.

AirAsia flexes its muscle

Aireen did not hesitate in calling the impasse a “national issue” and called for the prime minister to intervene.

“As a major contributor to Malaysia’s economy, AirAsia must be given a voice as we are the main user of klia2. AirAsia looks forward to resolve this issue as soon as possible.

“We will be the anchor tenant at the new airport, accounting for more than 80% of klia2’s traffic, hence the critical need for klia2 to be fully functional and operationally viable in the long term,” she said.

AirAsia yesterday claimed the Operational Readiness & Airport Transfer (ORAT) period for a transfer to support the size of AirAsia’s operations would be substantially more than the two months prescribed by MAHB.

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