

AirAsia not ready to move?

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The airport operator Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) and the largest tenant by far at the low-cost carrier terminal (LCCT) AirAsia are no closer to agreeing on the May 9 closure of the LCCT as ordered by the deputy minister of transport Abdul Aziz Kaprawi.

Aziz yesterday called for the LCCT to be closed one week after the May 2 opening date for the new klia2 terminal with all budget flights to be transferred over. His decision was a move seemingly to force a reluctant AirAsia to join Malindo Airways and Cebu Pacific, both of which did not pose resistance to the move.

In a statement yesterday evening, AirAsia refused to move by the deadline until certain "issues" can be resolved. "All AirAsia and AirAsia X operations will still be based at the current LCCT even after May 9 due to a number of unresolved pressing issues that still need to be addressed," the budget airline said.

AirAsia claimed construction flaws could "prove to be operationally disruptive to a hub airline such as AirAsia Group which has about 400 aircraft movements in a day."

"There are depressions on the taxiway/apron and runway which will necessitate periodic remedial measures to be undertaken on relevant areas," said AirAsia citing a report by Ikram Premier Consulting.

"We believe it is crucial to ensure that whole remedial steps are undertaken prior to a transfer, which will mitigate risks relating to any potential aviation incidents," the airline warned.

"We will see on that day," Aziz was quoted as saying in a Bernama report today on AirAsia's insistence to continue operating at the LCCT past the May 9 deadline.

According to the same Bernama report, government agencies such as Immigration and Customs will cease operations at the LCCT on May 9 and move to the new klia2. In addition, AirAsia is expected to meet the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to present its views on klia2.

'The truth is AirAsia is not ready to move'

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

"They don't have their headquarters ready; it's currently still at the LCCT. Any delay in klia2 is actually a boon for them," Singh added.

However, a persistence to stay for an extended period at the LCCT could prove detrimental, as the facilities at klia2 are much friendlier to passengers, not to mention more room to expand flight operations.

Calls to AirAsia CEO Aireen Omar were unanswered today.

No confirmation from MAHB

At press time, MAHB was unable to confirm the closing date of the LCCT as May 9. The airport operator senior general manager of operations Azmi Murad said he was not making any comments on the opening date and told KiniBiz to “check” with the deputy minister.

Azmi told Bernama klia2 would open according to schedule. Asked whether AirAsia would have enough time to complete the operational readiness and airport transfer (ORAT) testing, he said, “we will see.”

AirAsia yesterday claimed the ORAT period for a transfer to support the size of AirAsia’s operations would be substantially more than the two months prescribed by MAHB.

Anything less, according to AirAsia, is “unrealistic and overly-optimistic.” The airline added, “even the ORAT for the transfer from KLIA Main Terminal to LCCT in 2006 took longer than 2 months when AirAsia’s operations were significantly smaller.”

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