

Take some blame, AirAsia

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Tiger thinks the airline in red should own up for its tardiness instead of blaming everyone else for its own delays. A request for an extension of time to move to klia2 from the LCCT framed politely would help much more than finger pointing.

Welcome back from the weekend. You know Mondays don't really count so I trust you've had a well-deserved full two days of relaxation. Unfortunately, Tiger can't say the same for himself, what with AirAsia and the airports operator MAHB, short for Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd, going at each other's throats.

AirAsia is throwing a huge fuss over the May 9 deadline for the transfer of budget flight operations from the crummy low-cost carrier terminal (LCCT) to its replacement, the so-called 'hybrid' not-so-low-cost klia2.

It all started when on April Fool's day deputy transport minister Abdul Aziz Kaprawi called for the LCCT to be closed by May 9, a week after the May 2 scheduled opening date for klia2.

Unfortunately for AirAsia, which operates over 80% of the flights at the LCCT, Aziz Kaprawi was not pulling an April Fool's joke.

AirAsia CEO Aireen Omar wasted no time in speaking out against the rushed deadline, which in her words is "unrealistic and overly-optimistic" and flat out refused to move on safety concerns. She brought up recent allegations of construction flaws to support her argument, which Tiger thinks is a little flimsy – more on this later.

The following day – this would be last Wednesday, April 2 – Aireen turned a little self-conscious and claimed in a statement: "It might be perceived that AirAsia is deliberately... being difficult on purpose, but I can assure you that is not our intention."

In the same statement, Aireen, never one to antagonise others (unlike her boss), hinted at her unhappiness with MAHB for not addressing concerns of "functionality, safety & security of klia2 which are paramount to (AirAsia) staff... and passengers."

With the first blow thrown, the usually evasive MAHB sprang to its feet to defend its four billion ringgit long-overdue baby.

In the meantime, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had joined Aziz Kaprawi in putting up a united front for booting out AirAsia by May 9. Najib told journalists last Saturday AirAsia's obstinacy "seems arrogant, but if they say they have a reason and they want to negotiate with the government, I feel this is more suitable,"

Last Sunday, Azmi Murad, MAHB senior general manager of operations and rumoured as next in line for the top post told Bernama the company had complied with almost everything requested by AirAsia for it to operate from klia2 except for two strange requests; one for a spa and another for a museum. Tony Fernandes later confirmed the request for a museum was to "foster children's interest in the world of aviation."

In a Public Accounts Committee meeting yesterday, MAHB reportedly blamed AirAsia for the massive cost overrun as the budget airline was the "main reason for the upscaling" of the airport. 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.

Before we get to the bottom of this entire back-and-forth finger pointing, Tiger can't help but bring up AirAsia's harebrained suggestion back in 2009 to go it alone and build a private airport in Labu not more than 10 kilometres away, officially KLIA East @ Labu.

After much wrangling with government agencies, with MAHB being one of them, AirAsia dropped its plans for Labu in favour of more say in the design process for klia2.

What Tiger doesn't get of the latest tiff is why both sides, that is, AirAsia and MAHB don't lay out all the facts for us folks to judge for ourselves.

On AirAsia's refusal to move to klia2, Tiger has to agree with Najib in calling AirAsia "arrogant" because that's just what it is. A polite request for an extension in time would go along these lines:

Tiger puts on a high-pitched voice (imitating Aireen Omar): "We need more time, can we have an extension of so-and-so number of days to move to the new terminal? Here's why..."

Notice Tiger's politely framed request requires Aireen to state exactly how much time is required for the move. Right now, AirAsia appears to be asking for an open ended extension, without specifying how much extra time is needed.

Notice Tiger did not make mention of the construction flaws that AirAsia claims would present a safety concern for its staff and passengers. That's because it really

isn't such a big deal. It's been said time and again the cracks can be fixed. And Tiger is pretty sure the patching up can be done while the airport is in operation. Look up Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport. There were some major cracks there as the airport was built on soft soil – ring any bells? – but nothing of the sort that couldn't be fixed.

Curiously, a stack of photos of said 'cracks' landed on Tiger's desk last week with no one taking ownership for them. Was the timing a coincidence? Your guess is as good as mine.

If AirAsia is claiming life-or-death safety concerns where is their 'concrete' evidence? If four other airlines namely Malindo Airways, Cebu Pacific, Tiger Airways and Mandala Airlines don't seem to have a worry in the world for their safety at klia2 – all four airlines have agreed to move on the opening date of May 2 – then what exactly is AirAsia's problem?

Tardy AirAsia just isn't ready to move. They let slip this little fact when they said the two months allocated by MAHB for AirAsia to run their ORAT (operational readiness and airport transfer) was insufficient for the size of their operations.

To be honest, better planning could have helped. Instead, AirAsia was too busy calling out MAHB for the construction delays, which in total add up to two-and-a-half years, they neglected to plan ahead for the eventual move.

The gentlemanly thing at this point would be for AirAsia to own up and ask nicely for an extension of time, as Tiger demonstrated above. What we are seeing now is a blame game, and it won't help anyone; not AirAsia and not MAHB.

GRRRRR!

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