

Low-cost terminal opens for business

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VIP WELCOME: Abdullah awaiting the arrival of AirAsia Flight AK6315 at the low-cost carrier terminal in Sepang yesterday. With him are (from right) Chan, AirAsia chief executive officer Datuk Tony Fernandes, Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd managing director Datuk Bashir Ahmad and (second from left) AirAsia chairman Datuk Pahamin Rejab.

SEPANG: The region's first and largest low-cost carrier terminal opened for business yesterday, receiving its first flight just minutes after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi opened it.

AirAsia Flight AK6315 from Penang came in with 130 passengers who were warmly greeted by Abdullah at the tarmac after the plane touched down at 4.40pm.

This was the first of 19 AirAsia flights to land at the terminal yesterday.

In his speech, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Chan Kong

Choy said the 35,290 square metre terminal was equipped with 72 check-in counters and had enough parking bays for 30 aircraft at any one time.

"Even though this is a low-cost terminal, the facilities are far better than average. Similar terminals in other places have the open-air concept but in Malaysia we have built one that is fully air-conditioned," he said.

Among the first to arrive at the newly opened terminal was Bruneian Suhar Idris and her family, who did not expect to be greeted by the Prime Minister.

"I knew the terminal would be opened today (yesterday) and we would be among the first to arrive but I was shocked to find Datuk Seri Abdullah and other dignitaries waiting for us on the tarmac," she said.

The 39-year-old housewife said it was an unforgettable experience.

Deborah and George Martin from Northern Ireland said they were told onboard that they would be given a "warm recep-

tion at the terminal".

"But we didn't expect to be greeted by the Prime Minister himself. The facilities are great and very good," said Deborah.

Earlier, Abdullah said the Government would go along with any mutually beneficial agreement that Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia reached on domestic routes.

"I believe the chief executive officers of MAS and AirAsia are engaging in discussions in a

warm atmosphere and I am confident a good decision will be reached."

The Government decided last Thursday that MAS and AirAsia be allowed to fly major domestic routes together, with the national carrier providing the premium service and the budget airline providing the low-cost trunk services.

Both airlines had until Monday to submit details of their discussions to the Government

before a final decision is made.

He also stressed the importance of good maintenance for the terminal and its facilities, adding that care should be taken to ensure facilities were well maintained at all times.

He said he would direct Home Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Aseh Che Mat to ensure immigration services were smooth, efficient and friendly to match services given to passengers on their flights.