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MALACCA: The historical Batu Berendam Airport, upgraded at a cost of RM190 million and now renamed Melaka Airport, seems to have not met its objective of attracting major airlines.

Officially launched in February this year by Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, the airport has yet to live up to its fullest capacity despite the fanfare prior to the start of the upgrading exercise in 2008.

AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes had then proclaimed that his carrier will start operating from the new international airport by end of the same year.

Malacca state exco for Transport, Information and Consumerism R Perumal said the cause of the setback in the arrivals of major airlines is the delays in getting certain approvals.

“The international airlines are still working on getting permission from their countries to operate here and we are still in talks with the transport ministry to settle certain issues,” he said.

Perumal added that as of now, the airport is servicing Indonesian carrier Riau Airlines, which is operating daily, covering the Malacca-to-Pekan Baru route.

“Firefly will start its charter flight operations on a weekly basis soon while another Indonesian carrier Lion Airlines will start at the end of June, covering Padang, Pekan Baru and Malacca,” he said.

Perumal said when the upgraded airport was officially launched, it was about 90% complete. The entire renovation had just been completed.

Ready to operate at full capacity

Perumal dismissed suggestions that the airport has been idle since its launch.

“We had about 6.8 million local and foreign tourists coming in through this airport last year itself. A flying academy is using the facility as well.

“As far as the state government and the airport are concerned, we are ready to operate the facility at its full capacity,” he said.

Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd's managing director Bashir Ahmed gave an assurance that the airport will offer better services and facility to its users.

AirAsia, in an official statement, said that despite recognising Melaka Airport as a potential tourist and medical tourism hub, it does not have plans to operate from the facility for now.

“We have to consider many factors like operational facilities, transfer of assets, required workforce, route planning and other important features relating to flight operations and ground services,” it said.

Melaka Airport and particularly its control tower bear historical significance as it was the very same tower which guided the plane of Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister, to land from London on Feb 20, 1956, after talks on independence.

It was in Malacca that Tunku announced the date for the independence of then Malaya from the United Kingdom.

Major airlines giving RM190m Melaka Airport the miss

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