

Penang gets

increased air links

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GEORGE TOWN: The federal government has extended its liberalisation policy for air services to Penang as part of a long-term measure to spur the state's economy during the current global financial downturn.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat said the state's international airport was one of 13 destinations in the country that was being geared to have increased air links, including to Singapore, in the near future.

The ministry has already planned to allow a record 84 flights a week between Penang and Singapore by next year, while a new direct flight to Chennai run by AirAsia has also been approved for launch within the next four months.

Ong said the increased connections, including to several new regional destinations, would have significant bearing on the tourism potential of the state while boosting investor confidence.

"I am always mindful of the needs of the people, the industry and our economic requirements at the moment. That is a top priority," he said after launching

AirAsia's inaugural flight between Penang and Singapore at the international airport here yesterday.

Also present were Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai, AirAsia Bhd group CEO Datuk Seri Tony Fernandes and AirAsia Bhd chairman Datuk Aziz Bakar.

Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, meanwhile, also launched a new SilkAir service between Penang and Singapore in the afternoon.

Together with Singapore Airlines' daily service to Penang, the two sister companies will now operate a total of 21 weekly services between Penang and Singapore.

Ong noted that Penang currently had only 49 flights a week to Singapore.

He said the number would be increased to 84 flights by allowing more airlines, including Tiger Airways, Firefly, and Jetstar Airways, to set up operations here.

Ong added that plans for the RM250 million expansion of the Penang airport was already under way with pre-qualification process for consultants.

The expansion will include segregating passageways and halls for international and domestic passengers.