



Firefly urged to ply Melaka-Batam route

BATAM (Indonesia): The Melaka government will ask Malaysia's community airline Firefly to operate direct flights from the Batu Berendam Airport in Melaka to the Hang Nadim Airport here.

Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said the service was important to strengthen ties between Melaka and the Indonesian island and to encourage tourism in both areas.

"Many people in the Riau islands including Batam are keen to come to Melaka, especially to seek medical treatment under the health tourism programme," he said after the opening of the Gedung Asrama Quran Centre here yesterday.

It is a Quran learning centre built at a cost of RM426,545, including RM100,000 from the Melaka government.

At the function, the hostel which now accommodates 400 students, was named Asrama Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam. Also present was Riau governor Ismeth Abdullah.

Mohd Ali said the air service available now was from the Batu Berendam Airport to Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau province, while the journey by ferry from Batam to

Stulang Laut in Johor would take two hours.

"It will take another two and a half hours to Melaka by road on the North-South Expressway, while the flight from Batam to Melaka will only take 45 minutes."

He said many people in the Riau islands would like to seek medical treatment in Melaka due to the reasonable charges while the medical expertise and modern equipment were on par with that in developed countries.

He also said that from Sept 1, Firefly would serve the Batu Berendam-Singapore route and hoped the airline would add the Batu Berendam-Batam route.

Meanwhile, Ismeth said direct flights between Melaka and Batam would definitely foster ties between the people of Batam and Melaka.

Batam, which is 715 sq km in size, has a population of 991,400.

Mohd Ali, who is also the president of Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam (DMDI) or Malay World Muslim World, said the DMDI finance house planned to implement a number of economic projects in the Riau islands. — *Bernama*