

Reports by MARTIN CARVALHO, RAHIMY RAHIM, FATIMAH ZAINAL and BENJAMIN LEE

# En route to serving hot meals soon

## No more plain food, as MAS aims to resolve catering issues in near future

**PETALING JAYA:** The catering issues faced by Malaysia Airlines is set to be resolved with the national carrier taking steps to introduce new in-flight meals in the coming months as it works with new partners to enhance its offerings on board.

The airline, which ended its contract with its anchor caterer Brahim's Food Services (BFS) on Aug 31 after both parties were unable to achieve an amicable agreement, has been getting a barrage of complaints after affected routes saw passengers served with pre-packed meals or revised meal offerings as the airline transitions to a new catering service.

Passengers, especially those flying domestic routes, said the food and beverage (F&B) offerings did not commensurate with ticket prices after MAS resorted to "self-catering" after its deal with Brahim's ended.

However, flights departing from Kuala Lumpur to Auckland, Jeddah, Madinah, London, Osaka and Haneda remain unaffected, the airline stated.

"Malaysia Airlines is committed to addressing this issue and strives to provide passengers with a meal service that matches the value of their tickets while upholding our signature Malaysian Hospitality throughout their journey.

"We are actively working to reinstate hot meals and special meal pre-booking options on all impacted routes, and collaborating with new partners to introduce fresh in-flight meal choices in the coming months, thereby enhancing our on board offerings to ensure a satisfying dining experience for our passengers," said the Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) when contacted by *The Star* yesterday.

As for how long the temporary catering arrangement is expected to persist, MAG said full meal offerings are expected to resume in phases for affected sectors.

Effective Sept 11, it has reinstated hot meals for business class passengers on flights to Bangkok and Denpasar.

"We are expecting the arrival of additional high lifts equipped

with proper storage capabilities throughout this month and into October.

"Our goal is to accelerate the process of reinstating hot meals and the pre-order of special meal offerings to more affected destinations.

"We remain committed to collaborating with our partners to continually improve our in-flight dining experience," it said.

MAG also gave the assurance that no food is being prepared or cooked at its temporary distribution centre set up on the grounds of KLIA as alleged on social media.

"We would like to reiterate that we do not prepare and cook at our temporary distribution centre in KLIA.

"The distribution centre is established to manage the assembly of F&B items by respective suppliers, and the uplifting of airline meal carts on board via high lift trucks," it said.

It added its operation is also in accordance with standards set by the Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia (CAAM) and is endorsed

by the local health authorities, thus meeting food safety and hygiene standards.

"Malaysia Airlines also sources its food from reputable suppliers for sectors with hot meals and sectors with pre-packed ready-to-eat F&B items while adhering to stringent food safety protocols throughout the supply chain, it said.

On the airline's website, an update on Sept 6 said while food is provided on board, passengers have the option to bring their own meals, a policy that has been in place even before its disagreement with BFS.

Brahim's Holdings Bhd executive chairman Datuk Seri Ibrahim Ahmad said post-Covid-19, BFS had negotiated with Malaysia Airlines for a three-year contract with a two-year extension option to take effect from Jan 1, 2023, but this fell through.

Following this, there were two ad-hoc contract extensions, the latest of which was extended for two months to Aug 31 to allow for more negotiations, but it did not work out.

Ibrahim said the cessation of the arrangement on Aug 31 was due to failure to achieve an agreement over a new clause called "convenience termination".

On what is next for BFS, he said that the company will continue to serve 35 airline customers, including Qatar Airlines, Emirates, All Nippon Airways and "five other Top 10 airlines and four-star airlines", and the company is open to the possibility of growing its non-aviation catering business.

"We have started our non-aviation business like supply to supermarkets and cafe chains, which look promising," said Ibrahim, who believes the business will survive due to it being "highly specialised", other than the lack of industry players as most countries have only one or two airline catering companies, with the exception of Europe or the United States.

"The business will continue as long as air travel remains the best option for long distance travel as passengers need to be fed, especially on long journeys."

## MAS food safe for consumption, assures Loke

**PETALING JAYA:** Transport Minister Anthony Loke has assured that food packed by MAS is safe for consumption.

He said the airline had ensured that the food being distributed from makeshift tents at the KL International Airport was handled safely.

"All necessary steps are being taken to ensure food safety," he said after attending a dialogue held to coincide with the Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (MICCI) 50th annual general meeting held at Menara Star here yesterday.

The meeting saw the attendance of big wigs from various industries, including representatives from Shell Malaysia, HSBC Malaysia, Sime Darby Bhd, who discussed issues and best practices related to local industries.

Loke said the government



**Step in the right direction:** Loke (centre) posing for a picture together with Star Media Group chairman, Tan Sri Chor Chee Heung (fifth from left) and Standard Chartered Bank's CEO Mak Joon Nien (sixth from left) after attending a dialogue session at the MICCI 50th Annual General Meeting at Menara Star.

would refrain from intervening in the commercial decisions made by government-linked companies (GLCs), but said their boards of directors and management would be held accountable for arising issues.

He was quoted as having said on Monday that this was to prevent setting a dangerous precedent among certain parties that the government would always step in.

"This is purely a commercial

decision. The government cannot interfere every time there is a dispute between two private entities.

"This is purely a commercial matter and they have to settle it through commercial means.

"We do not want to send the wrong signal that certain quarters or companies are able to use their political cables or approach government ministers to solve their problems," he was quoted as having said.

## Passengers served a huge helping of disappointment

**PETALING JAYA:** The pre-packed meals and flight delays resulting from the catering issues faced by Malaysia Airlines following its decision to stop using an established caterer has left a sour taste with passengers.

Original Penang Kayu Nasi Kandar managing director Burhan Mohamed, who flew business class to Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Sept 4, said his flight had been delayed by two and a half hours due to the catering issue.

He said he was served an economy class meal which came in an

aluminium foil food container alongside items such as pastries and bottled water.

"I was given (single-use) wooden cutlery. When I asked for coffee, it was served in a paper cup.

"As they terminated the previous caterer, they should have prepared earlier.

"The passengers ended up as victims. What's more, the ticket prices are not reduced, we are paying the same prices," he said, adding that he felt aggrieved over the latest treatment, especially having been a loyal customer of Malaysia Airlines for

over two decades.

Burhan said he was informed that longer routes such as London, Tokyo and Doha were unaffected as the catering service came from another company.

"Why can't that company provide food for the shorter routes too?" he asked.

However, despite the less-than-ideal experience, Burhan said he would continue flying MAS, but hoped that the catering problem would be resolved soon.

Although passengers have the option to bring their own meals on board, Burhan said he would

feel a bit embarrassed to do so.

Social media has also been flooded with irate Malaysia Airlines passengers complaining about the food and beverage offerings lately.

Facebook user Marcus Zeng highlighted the pre-packed meal he was served during his business class flight from Kuala Lumpur to Hong Kong, which also experienced a 90-minute delay due to catering issues last week.

"Breakfast choice on business class was basically what they have in economy - cheap bakery goods, a chicken floss-filled roll, a

bad looking fruit cake, a tiny cookie and a cinnamon bun. I said I didn't want it," he said.

M Hatta Tarmizi, who flew from Kuala Lumpur to Kota Kinabalu recently, aired his discontent with the meals.

"The flight cost us thousands of ringgit (economy), and this is what we deserve?"

"High sugar content pastries expiring in a couple of days, an apple, a bag of peanuts, a bottle of water, no napkins or wet tissues and no prior warning that you're going to serve this kind of food before flights," he wrote.