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Perks to lure China airlines

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SHENZHEN: Chinese airlines that increase their flights to Malaysia or those landing for the first time at Malaysian airports will be given free landing and parking, said Transport Minister Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy.

He said the incentives were among the "open-skies policy" package Malaysia was offering to woo more Chinese for Visit Malaysia Year 2007.

"I have held discussions with seven airlines and visited five cities over the last nine days and I anticipate positive results soon," Chan told a press conference after Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) and Westports' presentation at a hotel here yesterday.

"Currently, China and Malaysian airlines operate a total of

80 landings a week and we want to increase this frequency."

Chan said the Chinese airlines had expressed strong interest in airports in Sibu and Kuching, and Malaysia Airport Bhd would follow up with them on flying to these destinations.

Among the airlines Chan had meetings with were Air China, China Eastern, Shanghai and China Southern Airline.

Chan said he had also offered the airlines pilot training in Malaysia's three flying schools in Malacca, Kota Baru and Langkawi, owing to the acute shortage of pilots the Chinese were currently experiencing.

He said it would be cheaper for them to send their pilots to Malaysia and furthermore both countries have strong bilateral ties.

On Tuesday, China signed a deal with Boeing for 80 Next-Generation 737 aircraft.

The 80 planes in the agreement combined with the 70 agreed upon in November 2005 now completes a planned 150-airplane purchase by the Chinese.

On port promotion, Chan said the two gatherings he had addressed in Shanghai and Shenzhen saw overwhelming response from shipping, manufacturers, forwarders and the business fraternity.

He said the focus of the gatherings was to promote PKFZ, Westports and the development of the *halal* hub in Port Klang.

"The *halal* hub drew the biggest interest because it is a new thing and something that is original in the world," he added.