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TAJUDIN: MAS BEING TRANSFORMED INTO GLOBAL COMPANY

By: Yong Soo Heong

PETALING JAYA, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- Malaysia Airlines is now undertaking strategies and restructuring various processes to transform it into a global company, said its chairman, Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli.

The various moves would place the national airline on a stronger footing to compete against other airlines, he added.

Saying that Malaysia Airlines was one of the few Malaysian companies that could aspire for a global ranking, he said these strategies and processes would have to be in place by Jan 1, 1998 when it moved to the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) at Sepang.

"The next 14 months will be very crucial to us. My greatest challenge is this programme now. But I am completely confident because I have lot of support internally. Judging from the response that I get from the senior vice presidents, managers and the the people on the ground, I think I am going to achieve it," he said in an interview with Bernama recently.

He said Malaysia Airlines was looking at its various work processes so that they could fall in place at the correct time.

"And the correct time is that we we cannot exceed 1998 because by then the new airport is going to be ready. That will be the defining moment."

He said by the time Malaysia Airlines made the "big shift" to Sepang, its profits "would really show the type of calibre that we are."

Tajudin said when he initiated various changes to the work processes at Malaysia Airlines about two years ago, he faced problems because there was apprehension as the staff did not know what he was driving at.

As such, he said he could only suggest superficial changes which pertained to putting some groups of activities into companies to enable them to focus on particular products.

As a result, five companies or core groups were set up to focus on passengers, ground handling, catering, cargo and engineering while the other sections of the organisation became supportive units to the core groups.

Presently, procedures concerning passengers, ground handling and catering are being actively being examined thoroughly to effect better systems.

For instance, Tajudin explained that the emphasis on ground handling was in view of the shift to KLIA while the emphasis on catering was because the company has been asked to undertake food catering for the 1998 Commonwealth Games.

"If you don't have the correct infrastructure, approach and mental attitude, you're finished," he said.

Tajudin said now that everyone in the company had understood what he meant by those changes, they would all benefit from them (changes).

Citing an example, he said when he mooted the idea of a training academy as his first priority after assuming the post of chairman and decided to send certain key people to train others, they felt they had come to a dead end or were put in cold storage.

"That was not my intention at all. But now you will find that many people are competing to come to the academy (in Kelana Jaya) because the academy is a place where you will find that whether you can shine or not."

On a larger scale, he said Malaysia Airlines together with Technology Resources Industries Bhd in which Tajudin is executive chairman would initiate a Malaysian Graduate School of Management programme together with

Universiti Pertanian Malaysia which produces the highest number of engineering-based graduates in the country.

He said he had informed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on its formation and a foundation would be set up to fund its operations, adding that other organisations and companies would be invited to join the effort to produce management graduates suited to the needs of the nation.

Tajudin stressed that having the right training programme, operating procedures and work flow were important factors in achieving excellence.

He said Malaysia generally paid little attention to the training of people.

"I always say that the key towards excellence is the human mind. Nothing else can be as powerful as the human mind itself. But that single greatest asset has always seen little attention being paid to it," he said. "That is why I keep stressing that you must be able to stand tall anywhere at all and you will not be overwhelmed."

Tajudin felt that Malaysians were generally not well-prepared when they were sent overseas to compete against foreigners.

"They just get lost in the crowd." Tajudin wants to avoid that. And hence the intensive training programmes being implemented throughout the company.

He said, "If we have these processes corrected, then they can stand their own ground" and used a Malay saying for emphasis, "Duduk sama rendah, berdiri sama tinggi dengan orang lain".

In a reference to Malaysia Airlines' strategic alliances with Virgin Atlantic and Ansett Airlines, he said they had been very good learning processes where the experience would be used as reference for further tie-ups with other airlines.

"While we are doing all these (strategic alliances), our people must be able to stand their ground. Otherwise they would be swamped by all these (developments)."

Tajudin's approach in changing the work processes may have ruffled the feathers of some in the organisation who were used to old procedures which stressed on seniority.

But under Tajudin's approach of optimising the talent available in the company, even a young executive of 30 who could deliver would be placed in charge of responsible matters in areas even far more important than his seniors!

Tajudin said, "We always fill up an organisation chart by saying this is how we are going to organise ourselves" and then put the people in. But then sometimes the people don't know what to do."

He admitted that by giving more emphasis on work processes, it was a lot more work "but you may find that the junior person's job is so much bigger than that of a senior. Then you have got to make adjustments."

He added, "Unless you change their work, look at the processes, work flow, you cannot just say that a particular person is not doing his work while others are doing their work. That is one of my biggest challenges and it is going to be one of our biggest successes."

Tajudin said that Malaysia Airlines has within its ranks a lot of people "who are very good but they are stuck and shunted to one corner".

He added, "Once you take and put them in one corner, they become de-motivated. To motivate them, you must give them opportunities to prove their worth. But under the present structure that we have today, it is very difficult.

"That is why we have to re-look and study the (organisational) structure. Once we have looked at the work flow and start to fill in the people, the good ones will start to lead. Once we change all our processes, I am sure we will have these people, now hidden in some corner, starting to

contribute. But to break it (structure) up is so difficult. We hope the (new) processes will help us overcome the difficulties."

Talking with much enthusiasm on the matter, he added, "To me, age is irrelevant, that's only chronological. But what is important is your ability to deliver. If a person is 30 years old and he can deliver, why not make him a leader? I am not going to be bothered with that." -- BERNAMA

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