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MAS sets pace with deal to buy Business Jet

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MALAYSIA Airlines set the pace for the opening day of the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace show yesterday with its announcement to buy a Boeing Business Jet, making the national carrier the first launch customer in Asia.

At about US\$33.75 million (RM114.75 million) in its basic configuration, the aircraft is expected to set new service standards for one of Asia's top airlines.

Besides the MAS deal, two memorandums of understanding and a sales marketing agreement were signed involving local and foreign companies on the sale of a light aircraft, the servicing of helicopter blades locally and regionally, and the development and implementation of an integrated software for the management of capital-intensive industries.

Three of the four events - excluding the agreement between Composites Technology Research Malaysia and Martha Janthorn Co Ltd - held at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre, the venue for the aerospace show, were witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The signatories for the Boeing Business Jet, a joint venture between Boeing Commercial Airplane Company and General Electric Co of the United States, were Malaysia Airlines managing director Datuk Wan Malek Ibrahim and BBJ president Borge Boeskov.

MAS executive vice-president (airlines) Datuk Bashir Ahmad told the New Straits Times that the purchase of the aircraft was decided two years ago as part of the overall fleet renewal plan.

"It is part of our consistent policy of ensuring that we will always have a young fleet.

"The BBJ, which is based on the Boeing 737 configuration, is also an aircraft with which we are familiar in terms of operations," Bashir said.

MAS is the largest operator of the B737 outside the United States.

Bashir said the aircraft was expected to be delivered by the end of 1999 and no payment would be made until then.

He also said that the MAS management had not decided if the aircraft would be used for scheduled services or for chartered purposes.

Meanwhile, CTRM director Jen (Rtd) Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Abdul Hamid and Matha managing director Gilbert Foong signed an agreement for the marketing of CTRM's Eagle light aircraft in Thailand.

It was witnessed by the Deputy Permanent Secretary to Thailand's Defence Ministry, Admiral T. Cheeppensuk.

Foong said that Matha aimed to sell 24 units of the Eagle 150B light aircraft by 1998.

CTRM chief operating officer George Blower said the targeted markets were military training centres, flying schools and agencies which carry out surveillance for forestry, traffic and border control purposes.

"The majority of training aircraft in Thailand are very old and coming to the end of their life span," said Blower.

"The Eagle is a brand new, fully certified and totally composite aircraft that will give no corrosion problems."

He said CTRM had sold 15 units of the aircraft so far, mostly from Australia, where the aircraft is being assembled. Orders for an additional 50 have also been received.

"We have also had inquiries from countries such as Argentina, India, South Africa, Europe, Japan and New Zealand.

"I think the word is starting to spread in the aerospace industry," he said.

The Eagle 150 is the first Malaysian composite light aircraft and has a fuel consumption of 23 litres per hour at a cruise speed of 224km per hour.

CTRM is one of the exhibitors at this year's Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition.

Plus and Plus Technologies (formerly Hexmann Aerospace Sdn Bhd) have signed a memorandum of understanding with Aviation Blade Services Inc of the United States to transfer the latter's technology to develop the helicopter blade industry locally and regionally.

Both parties will work on the technicalities of the deal phase by phase before a firm contract is established sometime next year.

Plus and Plus Technologies are confident that the partnership with ABS would assist the local helicopter industry in terms of faster maintenance and servicing and help save the country in foreign exchange.

Plus and Plus Technologies chairman Khalid Emran Yusof and ABS president David Stutesman were the signatories.

Dectra, a wholly-owned Malaysian Information Technology company, also signed a memorandum of understanding with Australian-based Mincom Pty Ltd yesterday.

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