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Shapadu in plane manufacturing venture

SHAPADU Corporation Sdn Bhd (Shapadu) has clinched a joint venture deal with Australia's Howard Hughes Engineering Pty Ltd to manufacture and operate the ALW 2000 light wing aircraft in Malaysia.

Under the agreement, Hughes would provide the technical expertise to manufacture the aircraft locally, while Shapadu would deal with financing and related aspects.

Speaking to reporters in Langkawi yesterday, Shapadu group executive chairman Datuk Shahrani Abdullah said under the agreement, the company will acquire a 70 per cent stake in the project while the remaining 30 per cent stake will be held by the Australian company.

He also said the company plans to set up the manufacturing plant near the Batu Berendam Airport in Malacca.

"If everything goes as planned, Malaysians can expect to see the first fully locally-manufactured light aircraft within next year," he said.

He said Shapadu's alliance with the aircraft manufacturing company is timely and in line with the Government's efforts to further develop the local aviation industry.

Shahrani said Shapadu is confident of the viability of the project due to the rapid growth of the aviation industry in the country.

"We also aimed to be the forefront in this aviation industry," he said, adding that the company's involvement in the industry is in line with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call on local companies to make inroads in the industry.

"I believe our affiliation with Hughes is a step towards this direction and I am very confident we would eventually design, produce and manufacture our own aircraft in the near future," he said.

This is the second time Shapadu is getting involved in the manufacture of aircraft locally.

In its first attempt, Shapadu entered into an agreement with a German aircraft manufacturer to produce and market the Dornier Seastar amphibious plane.

However, Shahrani said the plan was "grounded before it could even take off" because of many technical problems.

"It was a very valuable lesson for us. However, we are still very interested to get ourselves involved in the aviation industry and always on the look-out for opportunities.

"Finally, the time has come and we want to prove our seriousness in building Malaysia's own aircraft ... this would be possible following our agreement with Hughes," he added.

Meanwhile, the Australian company's owner and managing director, Howard Hughes said the company would initially introduce the ALW 2000 light wing aircraft in Langkawi.

He said the plane, which is powered by Austrian-made Rotax-912 engine, is specifically designed for basic flight training besides personal use.

"The plane has excellent manoeuvrability and it is the most user-friendly aircraft in its class.

"Its cockpit is built in such a way that it gives the pilot up to 80 per cent forward visibility, which is similar to that in helicopters," he claimed.

Hughes said the ALW 2000's cockpit is equipped with all the standard instruments like the altimeter, air speed indicator and compass.

He also said his company had been manufacturing light wing aircraft from 1985 and there are now 150 such planes flying in Australia.

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