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Shapadu ties up with Howard Hughes to make light aircraft

Sharanjit Singh

SHAPADU Corporation Sdn Bhd and Australian-based Howard Hughes Engineering Pty Ltd will jointly manufacture and operate the ALW 2000 light-wing aircraft in Malaysia.

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

Announcing this at the Langkawi Oshkosh East Fly-In yesterday, Shapadu group executive chairman Datuk Shahrani Abdullah said the company would hold a 70 per cent stake in the project and the rest by the Australian company.

The manufacturing plant would be located at Batu Berendam airport in Malacca.

"If everything goes as planned, Malaysians can expect to see the first fully locally-manufactured light aircraft within the next year," he said, adding that Shapadu's tie-up with the aircraft manufacturing company was timely and in line with the Government's efforts to further develop the local aviation industry.

Expressing confidence on the viability of the project, Shahrani said the local aviation industry was growing at a rapid pace and Shapadu wanted to be at the forefront.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has repeatedly called on local companies to make inroads into the aviation industry.

"I believe our affiliation with Howard Hughes is a step towards this direction and I am very confident we will eventually design, produce and manufacture our own aircraft in the very 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 make 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. We are still very interested in the aviation industry and are always on the look-out for opportunities.

"We want to prove our seriousness in building Malaysia's own aircraft ... this would be possible following our agreement with Howard 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 here.

He said the plane, which is powered by Austrian-made Rotax-912 engine, was 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 of helicopters," he said.

ALW 2000's cockpit has all the standard instruments like the altimeter, air speed indicator and compass.

According to Hughes, his company had been manufacturing light wing aircraft from 1985 and there were now 150 such planes flying in Australia.

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