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First Malaysian-made aircraft to take to US skies in November

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THE first Malaysian-made aircraft will take to the US skies this coming November with the delivery of two SME MD3-160s by local aircraft maker SME Aviation Sdn Bhd.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said this will bring another first for Malaysia's aviation industry as the SME MD3-160 will also be the first Asian manufactured aircraft to be certified for export to the US under the Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement (Basa).

"This light aircraft has now been fully certified for export to the US by the Malaysian Department of Civil Aviation in collaboration with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) of the US," he told reporters after the weekly Cabinet meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

"This is indeed a significant development following the signing of the Basa between Malaysia and the US in 1996," he said.

The Basa is extremely important because it accords recognition of Malaysian aeronautical products connected with civil aviation by the US through a process of technical evaluation and acceptance. It also provides companies with the first opportunity to enter the US market, which has the single largest market for light aircraft.

With the delivery of the first two aircraft, Dr Ling said, SME Aviation, through its joint venture company in the US called SME Aero Inc, will now be able to step up its sale of the aircraft in the US market.

"To mark the auspicious occasion, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has agreed to launch the two aircraft before they are sent to the US some time next month.

"However, the Prime Minister has yet to give a date for the launch, but the venue will be at SME Aviation's plant in Subang," he said.

The SME MD3-160 is a two-seater all-metal aircraft ideally suited for civil training, leisure and aerobatics flying.

"The first 10 aircraft have already been delivered to the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) and they are now in full operation at the RMAF's training base in Alor Star," Dr Ling said, adding that RMAF will take delivery of 10 more SME MD3-160s next year.

He said Industri Pesawat Terbang Nusantara (IPTN) from Indonesia has also signed a contract for the purchase of 20 SME MD3-160s. "However, we may have to renegotiate the deal as IPTN may not be ready to take delivery of the aircraft soon because of financial reasons," he added.

The price for a SME MD3-160 is between US\$150,000 and US\$200,000 (US\$1 = RM3.80).

On Malaysia Airlines' recent shift of some of its domestic flights back to the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang, Dr Ling said: "It will be maintained as long as it makes business sense to do so".

"I believe there is a demand for it (domestic flights from Subang).

"But the majority of Malaysia Airlines' domestic services will continue to be at the KL International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang because many passengers need to catch connecting flights as well as people who live in the immediate vicinity would want to fly from KLIA," he said.

Dr Ling also said the Government will take steps to ensure that residential houses will not be built too near the new airport to avoid noise pollution.

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