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AIM now turning to Russian aviation sector

Fauziah Ismail in Ulan Ude (Buryatia, Russian Federation)

ULAN UDE, Buryatia (Russian Federation): Following a successful collaboration with Lockheed of the US, Aerospace Industries Malaysia (AIM) is now turning to Russia, particularly this autonomous republic for a similar working relationship in the aviation and aerospace sector.

From Lockheed, AIM - through its subsidiary, Airod Sdn Bhd - acquired the technological expertise for the C130 military transporter.

With Ulan Ude Aviation Plant (UUAP) in Buryatia, AIM plans to open an Airod office in Moscow and set up a training, maintenance and logistics support centre for the Russian-made helicopters in Subang.

At the proposed new facility in Subang, AIM plans to "modify and upgrade" the helicopters to increase its marketability outside Russia.

"We do not want to take away what they are already doing here," AIM president Lt Gen (Rtd) Datuk Seri Mohd Yunus Mohd Tasi said.

"We want to complement and supplement them ... add value to their helicopters to increase their marketability," he told Malaysian newsmen here after a briefing for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the possible areas for cooperation between AIM and UUAP.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a two-day working visit to Buryatia, had toured the plant yesterday and had a first-hand view of the manufacture and assembly of aircraft by UUAP particularly the MIL MI-171 helicopter and the Sukhoi SU-26UB two-seater twin jet trainer-ground attack aircraft.

Mohd Yunus, who described the possible cooperation between AIM and UUAP as a "win-win" situation as both Malaysia and Buryatia would benefit, expects the collaboration to be finalised at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) show in December.

"It has been positive and encouraging ... by LIMA, we would expect some direction as to where this would take us," he said, when asked on discussions between the two companies on collaborative efforts.

AIM is encouraging UUAP to take advantage of Malaysia's strategic location, world-class facilities and incentives provided by the Malaysian Government in the high technology and aerospace industry sector, which can provide a platform for the support of UUAP aerospace products.

UUAM is also keen to establish a strategic alliance with AIM in Malaysia, recognising the many strategic advantages, comprehensive and developed infrastructure and quality workforce that Malaysia can offer. This would in turn provide a catalyst for UUAP to expand beyond its traditional market.

The UUAP products and related technology also present an opportunity for the Malaysian aerospace industry to enhance the country's current technology base and research and development activities.

AIM and UUAP are exploring the possibility for cooperation in product improvement and modernisation to meet the demanding needs of existing operators and new customers.

In return, Malaysia will be able to expand its existing aircraft modification and upgrade its capability. The Malaysian-Russian alliance would enable the two companies to compete aggressively in the global aerospace industry.

Mohd Yunus said following Malaysia's purchase of the two MI-17 helicopters for the Fire and Rescue Services Department, "we find that other customers want other modifications to the helicopters".

These include modifications to the helicopter's mainframe where

customers prefer a "ramp door" instead of a "clamp door" at the rear of the helicopter, replacing the avionics systems according to the customers' specifications and converting the three-man cockpit into a two-man cockpit.

There are some 100 Russian-made helicopters in the region.

Mohd Yunus said AIM has yet to determine which of its subsidiaries would be involved in the collaborative effort with UUAP but confirmed that if the collaboration is finalised, the proposed facility for the helicopter would be at Subang.

The AIM group of companies was initiated by the Government to spearhead the development of the aerospace industry in Malaysia.

Airod Sdn Bhd, its main subsidiary, is Malaysia's premier maintenance and overhaul facility for both military and commercial aircraft.

UUAP, which was established in 1939, is one of Russia's leading aircraft manufacturers.

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