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Russia-Aircraft

MALAYSIA GETS RUSSIAN INVITE FOR VERTICAL AIRCRAFT VENTURE

By: Azman Ujang

ULAN UDE (Russia), Aug 21 (Bernama) -- Russia has invited Malaysia to invest in the commercial production of what is believed to be the world's first multi-purpose vertical take-off and landing aircraft.

The C-16 amphibious aircraft which carries 16 passengers is not yet in commercial production but the Russian military is using such aircraft for patrols in frontier positions, including rivers in Siberia.

Senior executives of the Ulan Ude Aviation Plant here made the offer to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his visit to the plant, one of Russia's leading aircraft manufacturers.

"We are very comfortable cooperating with Malaysia, and we can combine our Russian intellectual power and your Malaysian industrial power.

"The production of the aircraft can be started soon and we need your investments. We want you to consider it, and we are ready to work with you," said a top company official, one of several who briefed Dr Mahathir who spent more than three hours touring the plant.

He estimated the demand for such aircraft to be in the region of 1,000 units.

The official told the prime minister that the idea of making the aircraft came about when company officials visited the Philippines which has thousands of islands.

He said the production of the aircraft was very cost effective and the cost of operating the C-16 was six times lower than other plans of similar capacity and four times cheaper than helicopters.

Describing the aircraft as an "air taxi", he said it could be built using a simple technology.

"Russia can build simple and very reliable aircraft," he said to Dr Mahathir who showed very keen interest on the venture and asked many questions about the specifications and capability of the C-16.

The only other vertical take-off and landing aircraft is the British Royal Air Force Harrier.

Among other things, Dr Mahathir asked if the aircraft could land on sea, and whether it could fly over forests and on rough seas.

The answer to all these questions was "Yes".

This was the second tour of an aircraft plant during the prime minister's visit to Russia. On Monday, he went to Komsomolsk-on-Amur, 400km from Khabarovsk in the Russian far east, which produces the Sukhoi series of fighter aircraft.

Dr Mahathir was also briefed on the production of the MI-171 helicopter, almost of similar type of the two MI-17 being used by Malaysia's Fire and Rescue Department.

The MI-171 is a utility helicopter for military transportation, cargo and logging.

The Ulan Ude plant, which celebrated its 60th anniversary last month, also produces the Sukhoi aircraft, SU-25UB, which also took to the air to display its superiority for the prime minister and members of the Malaysian delegation.

Dr Mahathir also climbed aboard the cockpit of the SU-25UB and even managed to joke by saying: "The instruments are all in Russian. If they are in English, I, too, can fly it."

Meanwhile, the Aerospace Industries Malaysia Sdn Bhd (AIM), in a statement released here in conjunction with the prime minister's visit,

said the Ulan Ude Aviation Plant (UUAP) was exploring the possibility of establishing a regional marketing centre and an engineering/product support facility in Malaysia that would be responsible for activities such as aircraft maintenance, parts distribution and training.

AIM president Lt-Jen (Rtd) Datuk Seri Yunus Tasi said UUAP products and related technology also presented 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 co-operation in product improvement and modernisation to meet the demanding needs of existing operators and new customers," he said.

In return, Malaysia has the opportunity to expand its existing aircraft modification and upgrade capability.

"This Malaysian-Russian alliance would enable the two companies to together compete aggressively in the global aerospace industry," said Yunus, a former Chief of the Royal Malaysian Air Force.

AIM was initiated by the Malaysian government to spearhead the development of the country's aerospace industry.

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

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