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Russia-Pilot
VETERAN MALAYSIAN PILOT SHOW-STEALER IN RUSSIA

By: Azman Ujang

ULAN UDE (Russia), Aug 21 (Bernama) -- It was not a Russian but a Malaysian pilot who stole the show during a flight demonstration at one of Russia's leading aircraft manufacturers which the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad visited here Saturday.

Retired Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) Lieutenant Colonel A. Munisamy took to the air in a MI-171 heavy-duty helicopter, which he never piloted before, in a 15-minute flight drill for Dr Mahathir who toured the Ulan Ude Aviation Plant for over three hours.

Munisamy, 53, now a project manager with Aerospace Industries Malaysia Sdn Bhd (AIM), was not in a pilot's uniform but in business suit.

As he alighted from the helicopter, he was swarmed by the Russian media and interviewed by television reporters.

Better known as Sam, Munisamy was with the RMAF for 31 years and has logged 5,000 hours of flying time, mostly flying its Nuri or American-made Sikorsky helicopter.

Asked by the Russian reporters to comment on the performance of the helicopter, he said he would "most definitely" recommend to the RMAF to buy the MI-171.

"It's a simple and practical helicopter to fly. It handles very well," he said.

He said it was time that the RMAF looked to Russia for its helicopter needs as the country produced work-horses without the frills which only would add up the cost of such aircraft.

"I wished I had this helicopter when I was with the RMAF. It would definitely enable the air force pilots to do their job better flying troops and goods," said Munisamy, who hails from Kuala Lumpur.

He said the MI-171 was definitely a better aircraft to handle than the Nuri and despite being bigger, could do more flight manoeuvres than lighter helicopters.

Munisamy said Russian-made helicopters were much cheaper than those made in most other countries because the manufacturers were more concerned about the reliability factor than aesthetic features.

AIM president Lieutenant-General (Rtd) Datuk Seri Yunus Tasi, who was Munisamy's boss when both were with the air force, was among those who congratulated him after the flight demonstration.

"Congratulations, Sam. You are a star overnight," said Yunus, in the midst of the TV interview.

Incidentally, Yunus is now Munisamy's boss as well at AIM, the Malaysian government-owned company formed to spearhead the country's development in the aerospace industry.

Yunus and a delegation of AIM officials are here for talks with the Russians on possible joint ventures in the industry, in conjunction with Dr Mahathir's visit.

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