

Malaysia Airlines buys ATR planes for Firefly

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ROME: Malaysia Airlines (MAS) yesterday signed an agreement with Avion de Transport Regional (ATR) for the purchase of ATR 72-500 turboprop aircraft for the national carrier's subsidiary, Firefly.

The contract could be worth up to US\$360 million (RM1.2 billion), with a list price of about US\$18.3 million (RM63.3 million) per unit.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Italian counterpart Romano Prodi witnessed the signing of the agreement at Villa Madama here. The leaders earlier had held bilateral talks.

Signing on behalf of MAS was its executive director and chief financial officer Tengku Azmil Zahrudin Raja Abdul Aziz while ATR was represented by its chairman of the board, Filippo Bagnato.

Speaking to reporters later, Tengku Azmil Zahrudin said the contract was for the purchase of 10 72-seater ATR aircraft plus an option for another 10 aircraft.

"The purchase of the aircraft is for the use of Firefly which has gone into its expansion phase,"

he said.

Firefly, he said, will be operating from its hubs in Penang, Subang, Johor Baru and Kota Kinabalu.

Tengku Azmil Zahrudin said the first delivery of two to three of the ATR aircraft is expected in October next year.

The aircraft would eventually replace the two Fokker 50s, which are now being operated by Firefly, he added.

ATR is jointly owned by Alenia Aeronautica (Finmeccanica) and EADS.

Finmeccanica, in a statement released here, said that this is the first time that the Malaysian national carrier was purchasing an ATR aircraft.

Its brand-new ATR 72-500 fleet will enable the airline to open new routes across Malaysia, it said.

These aircraft will be equipped with the "Elegance" cabin, light emitting diodes, in-flight entertainment and ETOPS 120 (Extended-range Twin-engine Operation Performance Standards), as well as the latest technological innovations in passenger comfort, communications and navigation tools, it added. —

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