

MAS inks RM62m deal

Airline to buy 20 turbo-propeller aircraft for Firefly

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ROME: Malaysia Airlines (MAS) is set to buy up to 20 turbo-propeller aircraft worth about US\$18mil (RM62.38mil) each for the use of its subsidiary Firefly from an Italian based short-haul aeroplane manufacturer.

The intention to purchase was made in the signing of a memorandum of understanding between MAS and Avion de Transport Regional (ATR), which was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Italian counterpart Romano Prodi here yesterday.

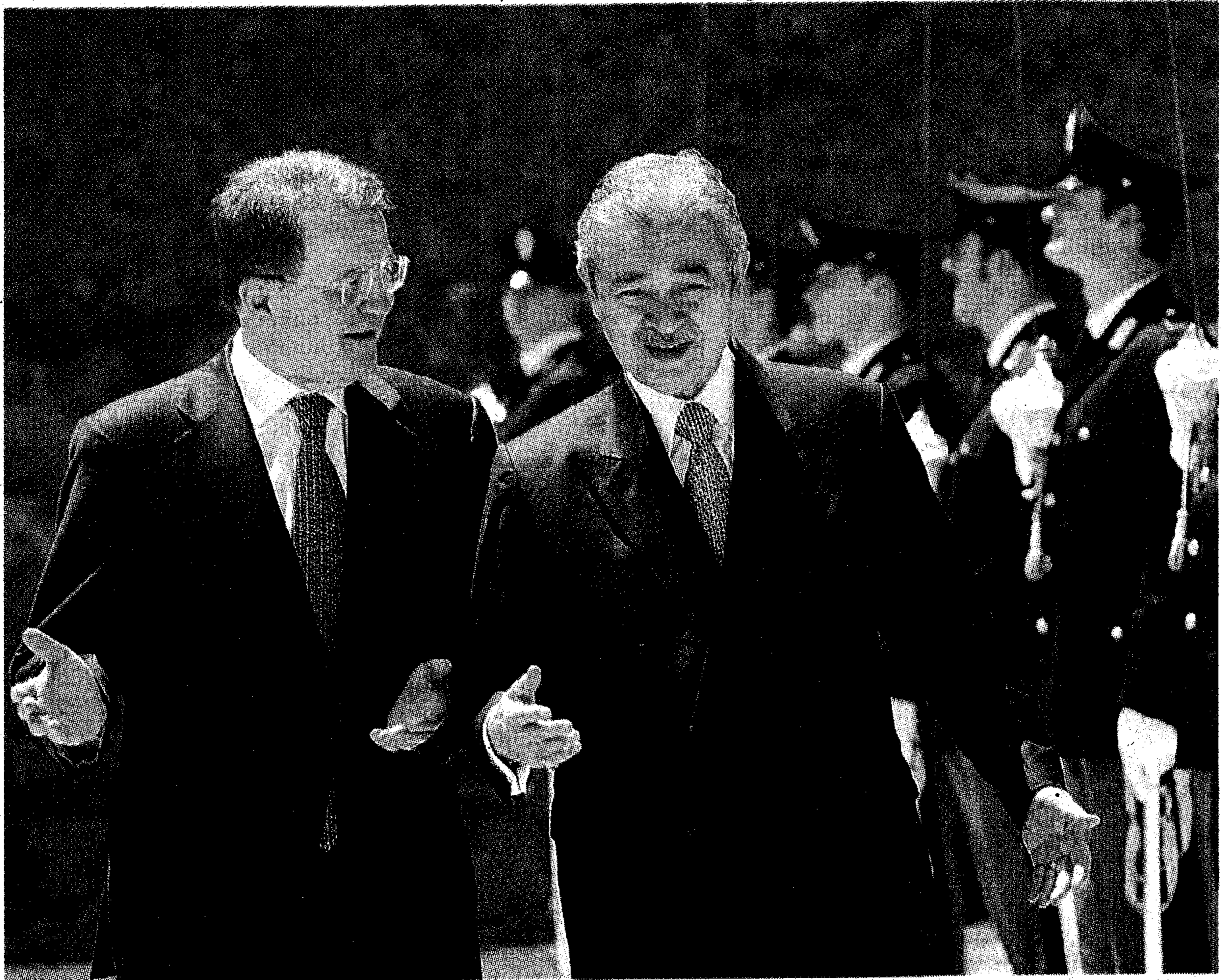
MAS executive director and chief financial officer Tengku Azmil Zahrudin Raja Abdul Aziz, who signed the document on behalf of the national carrier, said the ART 72-500s aircraft was for the use of Firefly, which would soon go into its expansion phase.

Under the memorandum of understanding, MAS will buy 10 aircraft initially and a further option to buy a further 10 later on.

He said MAS had been planning to replace its Fokker fleet for quite sometime "but was called off when the domestic route rationalisation exercise took place last year".

"The ATR 72-500s, which can carry 70 passengers, is suited for Firefly's expansion programme," he added.

Firefly was formed earlier this year and is termed by MAS as a community-based airline with low-cost prices. At present, Firefly flies to five



Official visit: Abdullah, accompanied by Prodi, walking past a guard-of-honour upon his arrival at the Villa Mardama in Rome yesterday. Later, they held talks on bilateral and international issues. — Bernama

destination from Penang.

Its managing director, Eddy Leong, who was also present at the MoU signing, said ATR was expected to deliver the first batch of "two or three aircraft" by October

next year.

"The ATR 72-500s will be based in our present Penang hub as well as our new hubs in Subang, Johor Baru and Kota Kinabalu," Leong added.

ATR is a joint venture by Aerospace (now EADS) and Aeritalia (now Alenia Aeronautica, part of the FINMECCANICA group) which specialises in short-haul turbo propeller aircraft.