

# Malaysia's aerospace sector takes off

Seven budding aviation players from here participated in FIA

by **V Sankara Subramaniam**

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The recent Farnborough International Airshow (FIA) 2014, in the UK, was not only a venue for the big players in the aerospace industry to showcase aircraft and aerospace technologies but also a venue for Malaysia to make its presence felt in the niche sector.

Thus it is not surprising that seven budding aviation sector players from Malaysia participated in the FIA under the auspices of Malaysian Trade External Development Corp (Matrade).

Though small in number, the Malaysian Pavilion, was located in a prominent location at the entrance to Hall 2 of the huge complex that is the FIA 2014.

This is an interesting development as all the while Malaysia has been the end user of the aviation assets and technologies from the Western dominated aviation sector.

Even after FIA 2014, Malaysia's AirAsia X, the long-haul affiliate of Asia's largest low-cost airline AirAsia, ordered 50 A330-900 Neo aircraft worth US\$13.8 billion (RM44 billion) to be delivered between 2018 and 2024. The airline also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for an additional 50 purchase rights with Airbus SAS during the airshow.

Also at the same event Weststar Aviation Services Sdn Bhd (WASSB) took delivery of its first of four AgustaWestland AW189 super-medium helicopters.

Malaysian high commissioner to the UK Datuk Ahmad Rasidi Hazizi told *Bernama* at the FIA 2014 in Hampshire, southwest of London, from July 14 to 20, that the Malaysian companies' involvement in many prestigious airshows of

late demonstrates the increasing capabilities of Malaysian players in the sector.

The airshow is an important event in the international aerospace and defence industry calendar, providing an opportunity to demonstrate the capabilities of civilian and military aircraft to potential customers and investors besides facilitating first-class business opportunities for the global aerospace industry.

Ahmad Rasidi said several aspects were being given priority in the nation's participation in the FIA 2014, especially in terms of knowledge sharing and transfer of technology from the industry's main players.

He said knowledge sharing and transfer of technology were important if the nation's aerospace industry is to fully realise its potential and the goal of making Malaysia the Southeast Asian aerospace hub.

"At the FIA 2014, we are especially focused on joint ventures in maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) programmes, offset programmes and the like as we don't want to be a nation that merely procures assets, but one which produces assets as well," he said.

He said foreign companies had already proven that they were confident in Malaysian ability concerning the aerospace industry, with several MoUs signed at the FIA 2014.

Meanwhile, Aerospace Malaysia Innovation Centre (Amic) chief executive officer Shamsul Kamar Abu Samah said Malaysia has been seriously developing its aerospace industry since the launch of the National Aerospace Blueprint in 1997. Now the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (Might) is in the midst

of preparing the new version of the blue print for 2015 to 2030 together with all relevant stakeholders.

"The first aerospace blue print launched in 1997, developing more than 150 companies, resulted in a revenue generation of RM9.5 billion not including airline activities till to date," he told *Bernama*.

He said Malaysia has been the global player in MROs with Airbus developing its presence in Malaysia through the setting up of the Airbus Customer Service Centre and the expansion of its joint venture maintenance unit Sepang Aircraft Engineering (SAE). Airbus holds 40% of the shares in SAE.

He noted that Malaysia has been one of the countries in this region that has significant composite material-based industries that concentrate on the manufacturing of aerostructures.

The Malaysian supply chain, he said, has been supplying various composite parts related to aircraft wings and fan cowlings to giant aircraft makers including the Boeing Co and Airbus.

"For the A320 family, Malaysia through the local supply chain is the single-source component supplier for the aircraft spoiler," he said.

"Moving on, Malaysia is targeting to secure more work packages from original equipment manufacturers by further developing its technical competencies through Research & Technology (R&T) activities of which Amic is taking the lead," he added.

At the FIA 2014, Amic signed a tripartite MoU with University of Nottingham and Asia Aerospace City, collaborating on R&D specifically on virtual designing, tooling supply chain development, repair and composite manufacturing. — *Bernama*