



F LYING HIGH

Russian and Southeast Asian Countries' Aerospace Projects



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Breakthroughs in cooperation between Russia and Southeast Asian countries are not commonplace yet. And we are glad when they do occur. The latest of them, in July 2010, came in civil aviation when the Russian entries of the international air show in Farnborough, England, signed a series of high-priced contracts and reached encouraging agreements with their counterparts from ASEAN countries. The Russian Sukhoi Civil Aircraft Company (SCAC) made a deal worth nearly \$1 billion with Indonesia's Kartika Airlines for delivery of 30 SSJ100 airliners to the Southeast Asian air carrier between 2012 and 2015. Orient Thai Airlines considers purchasing another 12 aircraft of this type (otherwise known as Superjets 100). Still in Farnborough, it signed a memorandum of intent with SCAC, and a contract is expected to be ready for signature in late 2010. For the present, Phongsavanh Airlines, a Lao air carrier that is on SCAC's roll of customers along with the Indonesian airline, placed an order for three Superjets 100, with deliveries to start in 2012.

Another Russian manufacturer, Irkut, entered into a contract with Crecom Burj Resources, a Malaysian company, at the same July air show for delivery of 50 new-generation MC 21 airliners for \$3 billion (in



catalogue prices). It is the biggest order for new-generation passenger jets designed in Russia. The MC 21 is to go into full-scale production in 2016. One more fact (related to military aircraft rather than civil aviation) will help fill out the picture – it was announced at Farnborough, without dates named or other details supplied, that Vietnam's Air Force will take delivery of 20 Russian SU-30MK2 fighter planes.

At the end of the air show, A.I. Fedorov, Management Board Chairman of the United Aircraft Corporation, said that his holding company rated Southeast Asia as a major market for its enterprises' products.

Like any deals of this kind, those made by the Russians at the British air show have a prehistory. As we look a couple of decades back we see Russia's cooperation in the aerospace industry with its ASEAN partners spawning new projects and ties from one year to the next literally beginning in the early 1990s. A batch of agreements with Southeast Asian countries for delivery of Russian military airplanes and helicopters has been reached and completed. Communication and remote Earth sensing satellites continue to be launched into orbit for those countries by Russian carrier rockets from Russian launch pads. Space vehicles are built to their orders. A \$200 million contract to manufacture a communication satellite for Indonesia's Telkom Company is the most recent example in this field. Project completion was awarded to the Academician M.F. Reshetnev Information Satellite Systems company in Krasnoyarsk, which is to build the satellite by August 2011.

Russia has particularly close and varied ties in aviation and space exploration with Malaysia. Back in 1994, that country contracted to buy 18 MIG 29 aircraft. The people who drafted, signed, and carried out the contract led the way to the Malaysian market

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for other competitive products of the Russian defense industry (including SU 30MK2 fighter planes ordered by Malaysia in 2003). A boost was also given to bilateral cooperation in high technologies, both military and civilian. The Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA) on Langkawi Island has long been an excellent ground on which Russians



and Malaysians – pilots, design engineers, managers, and government representatives – enter into professional contacts and learn more about one another’s potentialities.

In September 2000, Russia helped put a Malaysian remote Earth sensing mini-satellite into orbit. That year, fires raging in the jungles of Sumatra and Kalimantan at regular intervals turned into a common disaster for Southeast Asia. Suffocating whitish haze, almost the like of which caused discomfort to Muscovites and other Russians last summer, was suspended in the air above many of Malaysia’s territories for long periods. Data beamed down

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Malaysia’s trouble suggested the use of Be 200 seaplanes, the latest product of the Beriyev Avia-

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tion Scientific-Technical Complex in Taganrog, against fires in the region. It’s a pity that the talks conducted at the time produced no practical results. This aircraft type gave a good account of itself later putting out fires in France and Italy, and in Russia itself where it was much in demand in midsummer 2010.

Anyway, cooperation in aviation and space exploration with Malaysia continued. The successful launch of the Malaysian MEASAT-3 telecommunications satellite from the Baikonur launch site in December 2006 was its next major highlight. Long before the launch, everybody in Malaysia knew that their country was soon to have its first antariksawan (“spaceman” in Malay) and that Russia would send him up into orbit.

On October 10, 2007, Sheikh Muszaphar (full name: Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor Al Masrie bin Sheikh Mustapha), 36, a medic by training, handpicked out of 11,000 applicants went up into space riding the Souz-TMA-11. On arrival at the International Space Station, he did a series of experiments under the national space program to study the effect of microgravity on the human body and its vestibular adaptation, and so on.

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fasting, and was to say shorter prayers and perform daily rituals going by Kazakhstan's time.

Although the landing was not fully perfect, it did not cool Kuala Lumpur's desire to continue cooperation with Russia in space. The parties discussed what Sheikh Muszaphar's stand-in, Major Faiz Khaleed of the Royal Malaysian Air Force, was to do. Both wanted him to continue training and start research at the Center for Medico-Biological Studies in Moscow. The Malaysian government planned to buy the space capsule that had brought the "Malaysian Gagarin" back to Earth and put it on show as a symbol of the country's advance in science and technology. The plan could not have come at a worse time as a global crisis broke out. The national program was suspended – for only a short time, as both Malaysia and Russia hope. Judging by the Farnborough 2010 results, it would not be lost for nothing – Russia and its Southeast Asian partners will have their hands full in space (and on Earth, too). Deliveries of a large number of airliners will be followed by deployment of after-sales services, personnel training, and modernization of the growing number of Russian-made aircraft. The ties of cooperation are to be established on a long-term basis. ■