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UniKL deal to increase pool of trained aircraft engineers and technicians

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PETALING JAYA: More aircraft maintenance professionals will be produced over the coming years following the signing of a letter of intent between Universiti Teknikal Mara Sdn Bhd (UniKL) and Base Maintenance Malaysia Sdn Bhd (BMM).

Under this partnership, UniKL and BMM aim to develop industrial training programmes to expand Malaysia's pool of trained aircraft engineers and technicians, professionals who are in high demand as the civil aviation sector soars again following the normalisation of travel in the post-pandemic era.

This career pathway will provide UniKL students with aircraft maintenance training and many opportunities to become licensed aircraft engineers or technicians.

Upon graduation, they will be eligible to apply for full-time jobs at BMM's upcoming maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) operations in Subang Skypark, planned as Malaysia's foremost aerotropolis under the decade-long Subang Airport Regeneration Plan (SARP) costing RM3.7bil.

The signing of the letter of intent took place on Thursday on the sidelines of the ongoing Selangor Aviation Show 2024 at the SkyPark Regional Aviation Centre (RAC), next to Subang Airport.

BMM was represented by its chairman Jeremy Yew, who is also the senior vice-president of SIA Engineering Co Ltd (SIAEC), the parent company of BMM.

Last December, SIAEC, which is the MRO arm for Singapore Airlines, signed a 15-year lease with a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Bhd for the use of two hangars at Subang Airport, with the option to extend the lease for another 15 years.

Khazanah is the sole shareholder of Malaysia Aviation Group, which owns Malaysia Airlines.

Yew said BMM currently employs 150 technical staff members, more than 20% of them being trainees from programmes in collaboration with Malaysian institutes of higher learning, including Admal Aviation College, APR-Aviation Training Centre and UniKL.

This collaboration is expected to generate a sustainable stream of talent for the civil aviation sector that will be recognised by regulators.

For example, the APR-Aviation Training Centre is a maintenance training organisation approved by the Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia (CAAM), with the centre having a track record in training licensed aircraft engineers and technicians.

"Our goal is to give trainees hands-on experience in our facility and good jobs within our organisation. We also aim to expand further, ensuring a sustainable talent pipeline to drive the growth we hope to achieve here," he added.

On the training collaboration, young Malaysians may opt to specialise in either the mechanical or avionics trade during their one-year training, which will take place in both Malaysia and Singapore.

On the subject of qualified personnel, Yew said fewer than 10% (13 out of 150 technicians) of its new hires here came from MAB Engineering Services (MABES), the MRO arm of Malaysia Airlines.

A CAAM audit in June found that 63 engineers and technicians had left MABES, leaving it with a staff shortage.

This phenomenon has led to claims that SIAEC had engaged in staff pinching, which in turn had been partly blamed for MAS' recent spate of flight disruptions.

"We hire through open recruitment processes, including from career fairs and job portals, with the criteria for staff hired from MABES the same as those applied to the remaining 90% of SIAEC's technical workforce.

"We have never poached personnel from any particular company," Yew said.

Dr Mohd Hafizi Shamsudin, dean of UniKL's Malaysian Institute of Aviation Technology, said: "We are excited to collaborate with BMM to cultivate the next generation of skilled aircraft engineers.

"This partnership marks a significant milestone in our continuous efforts to advance Malaysia's aviation education and training landscape.

"By aligning our academic programmes with industry needs, UniKL graduates are not only knowledgeable but also equipped with the real-world experience required to thrive in the global aviation market," he said in a statement.