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Malaysia Airports Expects Robust Momentum to Continue in 2024

The recovery of Malaysia Airports Group's passenger traffic has reached 95.4% against pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels at the end of the first half of its financial year 2024 (1H2024), which saw its Malaysian operations carrying 45 million passengers out of the total 65 million passengers.

Its 1H2024 results also showed a 20.5% higher revenue of RM2.73 billion compared to the same period of the preceding year (1H2023).

The Group also reported higher Earnings Before Interest Taxes, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) of RM1,321.4 million for 1H2024 from RM1,025.3 million in 1H2023. Its net profit rose 146.3% to a record RM395.8 million compared to RM160.7 million in 1H2023.

The improved financial performance was underpinned by the sustained recovery in passenger traffic, with its international passenger movements improving by 28.9% to 34.1 million passengers in 1H2024 versus 26.5 million passengers in 1H2023.

During this period, six new airlines, namely Cambodia Airways (KR), flydubai (FZ), Iraqi Airways (IA), Juneyao Airlines (HO), Thai Lion Air (SL) and Turkmenistan Airlines (T5) started their operations in Malaysia.

"The average load factor for 1H2024 stood at 78.8%, surpassing the 1H2019 level by 3.4 percentage points," according to Malaysia Airports, whose latest results for July 2024 saw the Group achieving several notable milestones in passenger traffic.

For the first time since 2020, the Group's monthly passenger traffic, including its Turkish asset, Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen International Airport (SAW), exceeded 12 million passengers.

Total passenger movements for the Group in July 2024 reached 12.4 million, up 7.3% from the previous month, largely driven by its local airports, which registered higher growth to 8.5 million passengers, a new monthly record since the pandemic.

Of this, 4.5 million were international passengers and the rest domestic passengers.



Malaysia Airports Managing Director, Dato' Mohd Izani Ghani said, "Together with our airport community and partners, we are committed to sustaining this growth trajectory through continuous improvements in passenger experience, connectivity, infrastructure and operational excellence."

Key markets such as Indonesia, China and Singapore dominated in July. Coupled with the advent of Qingdao Airlines' (QW) direct thrice weekly flights to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) on July 9, 2024, new route launches and increased frequencies by other airlines, they have contributed to a total seat capacity recovery of 85.8%.

AirAsia Malaysia (AK), which introduced its thrice-weekly flights from KUL to Sihanoukville (KOS) in Cambodia on July 3, 2024, will be expanding its reach to China with its four-times weekly Penang (PEN) to Shenzhen (SZX) services and three-times weekly Kota Kinabalu (BKI) to Shantou (SWA) flights on October 28 and November 16, 2024 respectively.

Two million Malaysians have reportedly travelled to China since the Chinese government granted visa-free entry until December 31, 2025.

Firefly (FY), which started its three-month chartered service connecting Tawau (TWU) in Sabah to Chengdu (CTU) with its four times weekly flights in July, also launched four times a week non-stop services from TWU to Macau (MFM) using the Boeing 737-800 aircraft.

More China-based carriers such as Shenzhen Airlines (ZH) have also started flying directly to PEN, with ZH commencing its thrice-weekly flights on July 27, 2024.

China is one of Penang's top three source markets. Currently, Penang has 15 direct flights connecting to international cities, including Guangzhou, Xiamen, Hong Kong, Haikou and Shanghai from China.

Currently, AK operates 16 routes across Indonesia, from Kuala Lumpur to Kertajati, Banda Aceh, Jakarta, Bali (Denpasar), Medan, Padang, Pekanbaru, Makassar, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Balikpapan, Lombok and recently launched its direct thrice-weekly KUL to Labuan Bajo flights on September 3, 2024. The low-cost carrier also flies from Penang to Jakarta and Medan, as well as from Kota Kinabalu to Manado.



Dato' Mohd Izani is optimistic about Malaysia Airports maintaining the positive momentum in its Group operational and financial performance with international passenger movements expected to remain strong, driven by the summer season demand.

"We will continue pressing for enhanced connectivity and increasing the number of airlines operating in both Malaysia and Türkiye while continuing to focus on improving passenger experience at the airports.

"With the new Operating Agreements and gazettment of new Aviation Service Charges up to December 2026 in place, we are able to better invest in the airport infrastructure and operations, ensuring that we meet and exceed the expectations of our passengers and stakeholders as well as support the Group's long-term vision of growth and excellence," he added.

Aerotrain Services to Resume in 2025

Updating on the automated people mover system (Aerotrain) at KL International Airport Terminal 1, Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook announced it would be operational by January 31, 2025, ahead of the project's original March 31, 2024 completion date.

Malaysia Airports finalised the expedited timeline via a contract signed on June 14, 2024 between the airport operator's wholly-owned subsidiary, Malaysia Airports (Sepang) Sdn Bhd, Alstom Transport Systems (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd and IJMC-Pestech JV, a joint-venture between IJM Construction Sdn Bhd and Pestech Technology Sdn Bhd.

According to the Transport Minister, this timeline is contingent on the successful completion of all necessary commissioning and testing.

Two of the three Aerotrain sets, which arrived recently, are being installed.

Malaysia Airports will be receiving the third set of the Aerotrain, which is used as a back-up, in October 2024.

Upon the completion of their installation, they will enter the inspection stage where the aerotrains will be tested on the actual tracks.

Urging Malaysia Airports to closely monitor and ensure all processes and tests are properly carried out to ensure no more delays, Loke reminded that 2025 is a significant year for the country as Malaysia will chair the Association of Southeast Asian Nations meetings.

Meanwhile, he said the shuttle bus services will continue as an option for passengers due to the heavy passenger movements.



A Step Closer to Southeast Asia
with British Airways' Expanded Codeshare

British Airways (BA) has expanded its codeshare partnership with Bangkok Airways (PG), which enables seamless travel from the United Kingdom to destinations not only in Thailand but also in Cambodia, opening up five new destinations.

They are Phuket, Koh Samui and Chiang Mai in Thailand as well as Phnom Penh and Siem Reap in Cambodia.

Passengers can choose to incorporate a stopover in Bangkok before continuing to their final destination on the same ticket.

Earlier this year, BA announced its direct thrice weekly flights from London Gatwick to Bangkok will return on 28 October 2024 after more than four years. The codeshare tickets are now available for bookings for travel from this date.

Members of BA's Executive Club loyalty programme can collect both Avios currency and earn Tier Points when flying on PG on a BA codeshare journey.

Avios can be used as part-payment towards reward flights or upgrades besides hotel stays, car hire and more while Tier Points can help the members earn status to unlock benefits such as lounge access and free seat selection.

BA's codeshare partner, PG, operates an extensive domestic network in Thailand and flies to destinations in

Cambodia, Hong Kong, Laos, Maldives and Singapore.

The Asian boutique airline has more than 20 aircraft decorated in different liveries of its exotic destinations.

Meanwhile, at the recent Farnborough International Airshow, BA announced a £21 million investment to fully fund up to 200 places on its coveted Speedbird Pilot Academy recruitment programme for 2025.



Launched last year, funding was in place for an initial 100 places on the 2025 programme, which has now been increased to 200.

The training takes two years to complete to become a qualified First Officer with BA. The airline currently employs around 4,000 pilots.

For more information, visit www.britishairways.com



July's New Milestones for Cathay Pacific Airways

Cathay Pacific Airways (CX) has achieved a new milestone by carrying more than two million passengers in a single month for July 2024 since the COVID-19 pandemic, representing a 15.1% increase compared with July 2023.

For the first seven months of this year, the number of passengers carried rose by 32.5%, reaching a total of 12.67 million.

July, marking the start of the traditional summer travel peak, also saw the highest 85.5% load factor in 2024.

“Such robust demand was driven by the increased popularity of long-haul flights to and from Hong Kong in the first half of the month among students and those visiting friends and relatives.

This was followed by a surge in demand for travel to popular short-haul destinations in Japan and Southeast Asia (SEA) in the second half of July.

LAVINIA LAU

Chief Customer and Commercial Officer
of Cathay Pacific Airways (CX)

Additionally, CX saw strong demand for flights to Paris due to the Olympic Games.

Lau envisaged the robust travel demand to continue through August and into September with the students returning to the United Kingdom ahead of the new school year.

“Concerning cargo, we expect that demand will remain at healthy levels as we head towards what we anticipate will be a strong peak from September until the year end.

“We will be increasing our freighter frequencies on transpacific routes and making full use of our long-haul passenger belly services to cater for customers' requirements.”

Cargo demand was strong in July with healthy year-on-year tonnage growth. Across CX's network, she said its tonnage was 2% higher than in June 2024 and 10% above July 2023.

“Given July is traditionally a softer month for demand, this was encouraging and bodes well for August.

“In terms of commodity mix, we observed an uptick in perishable goods shipments from SEA and South West Pacific into Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland.”

With the relaunched of Cathay Courier in July focusing on digitalisation to add greater transparency, customers can send their urgent, time-sensitive and high-value shipments with Cathay Cargo and track their shipments online.

Overall, the Cathay Group, including its airlines, subsidiaries and associates, reported an attributable profit of HK\$3,613 million in the first half of 2024 compared to 2023's first half profit of HK\$4,268 million.

Meanwhile, its low-cost carrier, HK Express, has announced the launch of a new route between Hong Kong and Penang, which will commence on November 21, 2024.

“Our customers can continue to look forward to more exciting destinations being added to our network as we work towards reaching 100 destinations as a Group within 2025,” Lau added.

For more information, visit www.cathaypacific.com



Double Honours for Philippine Airlines at LinkedIn Talent Awards 2024

Philippine Airlines (PAL), with a workforce of more than 6,000 staff, has been recognised as the Best Employer Brand 2024 at the recently concluded LinkedIn Talent Awards for the Philippines.

The Philippine flag carrier was also the top finalist for the Learning Champion award category.

Captain Stanley K Ng, PAL President and Chief Operating Officer said the two recognitions inspire the airline to continue investing in its team, empowering them with an environment of excellence and continuous learning.

Meanwhile, PAL's recently released first half results for 2024 (1H24), which saw a higher volume of passengers, cargo and ancillary services, generated US\$1.6 billion in total consolidated revenues.

The airline expanded its flights by 11% and carried 7.9 million passengers across its network, which worked out to be 13% more passengers year-on-year.

Its Mabuhay Miles lifestyle programme reached a new milestone with six million members.

Amid a normalising market environment, PAL reported a net income of US\$122 million and operating income of US\$182 million for the 1H24.

The airline will launch its new thrice-weekly Manila to Seattle service on October 2, 2024, deploying the

Boeing 777-300ER aircraft.

PAL recently acquired an additional B777-300ER as part of its long-haul fleet renewal plans. It expects to receive nine brand new Airbus A350-1000s to be delivered in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Additionally, the new Seattle flights are expected to add up to 60 tons of cargo capacity weekly, contributing to increased trade and economic activities between the United States (US) and Asia.

As the first airline to link the Philippines and the US Pacific Northwest region with direct flights, Seattle will be PAL's sixth destination in the US and its eighth in North America.

The airline currently operates 46 weekly flights to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Vancouver, New York, Toronto, Honolulu and Guam.

Via PAL's airline partners, travellers can also enjoy connectivity to other US mainland cities such as Chicago, Houston, Las Vegas and Washington DC.

PAL's extensive network includes cities like Cebu, Davao, Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur.

For more information, call **+603 2181 6988/3988** or visit **www.philippineairlines.com**



Qatar Airways' Deals with Airlink and Maldivian

Multi award-winning Qatar Airways' (QR) latest acquisition of a 25% stake in Airlink (4Z), southern Africa's premier independent regional carrier, will not only further develop its operations but also be a key driver to bolster its growth strategy.

Rodger Foster, 4Z Chief Executive Officer (CEO) said: "Having Qatar Airways as an equity partner is a powerful endorsement of Airlink and echoes our faith in the markets we serve and plan to add to our network.

"This transaction will unlock growth by providing efficiencies of scale, increasing our capacity and expanding our marketing reach."

Airlink currently flies to more than 45 destinations in 15 African countries. Enhancing the code-share partnership between the two airlines, the deal will also be a key driver to the continent's economic success.

"Our investment in Airlink further demonstrates how integral we see Africa being to our business' future."

"This partnership not only demonstrates our confidence in Airlink as a company that is resilient, agile, financially robust and governed on sound principles but also in Africa as a whole, showing huge potential that I am delighted we are able to help start realising."

ENGINEER BADR MOHAMMED AL-MEER
Group Chief Executive Officer
of Qatar Airways (QR)

Both carriers' loyalty programmes, QR's Privilege Club and 4Z's Skybucks will be aligned.

QR, which flies to 29 destinations in Africa, newly added African cities such as Abidjan, Abuja, Accra, Harare, Kano, Luanda, Lusaka and Port Harcourt to its network while its services to Cairo and Alexandria have resumed.

The airline recently signed a new interline partnership with Maldives' national carrier, Maldivian (Q2), offering more choices for seamless travel, competitive flight fares and coordinated flight schedules.



At present, QR serves the route to Male with daily services while Q2, a leading domestic carrier in Maldives with a network of 17 destinations, also flies to Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

For more information, visit **qatarairways.com**



All Nippon Airways Celebrates Twice Daily Flights to Kuala Lumpur

With All Nippon Airways increasing to twice daily flights to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) starting September 1, 2024 from its two international airports in Tokyo Narita (NRT) and Tokyo Haneda (HAN), the airline's current 12 times-weekly frequency has been raised to 14 times-weekly.

Celebrating the occasion, Japan's largest airline treated its arriving passengers from September 1 to 7 with vouchers offering discounts that are redeemable within the month from ANA's partners such as AEON, IPPUDO Malaysia, MAISEN Malaysia KLIA Ekspres, Books Kinokuniya Malaysia, Mitsui Shopping Park LaLaport Bukit Bintang City Centre and Mitsui Outlet Park KLIA Sepang.



Its departing passengers from KUL to HAN on flight NH886 on September 1 were given a food and beverage pack from Pos Aviation as well as souvenirs from ANA and Tourism Malaysia.

ANA will continue to operate these added frequencies using the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft with 246 seats, of which 40 are business class while 14 are premium economy and the remaining 192 seats are economy class.

The airline's business and premium economy class seats, known for their exceptional comfort, remain popular among both Malaysians and international travellers flying to Tokyo as they offer a convenient option for seamless connections to cities in the United States such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago with short transit times.

Passengers departing from KUL on ANA's economy seats enjoy complimentary baggage allowance for up to two pieces of 23 kg each along with halal inflight meals, entertainment onboard and amenities such as pillow and blanket in every seat.

ANA has also announced the resumption of its thrice-weekly flights from NRT to Perth on October 14, 2024 while its NRT to Hong Kong route will increase to four times a week starting October 27, 2024.

For more information, call **+603-2032 1331** or visit **www.ana.co.jp/group/en/my**



Emirates Deepens Global Presence with New Partnerships

Over the past year, Emirates (EK) has doubled the cities it offers beyond its network to nearly 1,700 additional ones, thus enabling an average of over 61,000 passengers to seamlessly connect on the airline's shared networks with its 162 partners in over 100 countries each week.

The 16 new partnerships launched since 2023 include codeshares with Avianca and Batik Air Malaysia while interline arrangements were finalised with Kam Air, Sri Lankan Airlines, Condor, Flynas, Viva Aerobus, Sun Express, Maldivian, Siberia Airlines and Kenya Airways.

This brings to a total of 31 codeshares, 118 interline agreements as well as 13 rail and helicopter services partners.

EK's Asian network is bolstered through the airline's 12 codeshare partners and 42 interline partners reaching over 500 popular cities across the Far East, West Asia, Indian Ocean and the Middle East.

India's leading airline, IndiGo (6E), celebrated its 18th anniversary recently operating a fleet of over 350 aircraft that serves an annual base of 100 million plus customers.

Since exiting the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, the low-cost airline has embarked on its strategy of moving towards new heights and across new frontiers.

Taking tangible steps in defining its next phase of growth towards becoming a global aviation player, the airline placed the largest ever single order of 500 Airbus A320 family aircraft to provide it with a steady stream of deliveries between 2030 and 2035.

6E plans to introduce the A321 extra-long range planes in 2025 and expects the delivery for the firm order of its 30 widebody A350-900 to start in 2027.

With India's soaring economy, it is time for us to redefine air travel once again and provide our evolving customers more benefits as they travel the world with us.

PIETER ELBERS
Chief Executive Officer
of IndiGo (6E)

Currently, the airline operates around 2,000 daily flights and connects to over 85 domestic destinations and 30 plus international destinations.

Our partnership growth ambitions align with Dubai's Economic Agenda D33 strategy to make our home and hub the most connected city in the world, attracting business, tourism, and investment from all over the globe.

ADNAN KAZIM

Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer
of Emirates (EK)

The airline's loyalty programme, Emirates Skywards, and EmiratesSkyCargo work closely with the codeshare and interline partners to support and complement its robust network of over 140 destinations.

Its cargo arm recently placed a firm order of US\$ 1 billion for an additional five Boeing 777 freighters with immediate delivery between 2025 and 2026. This will bring its total order book to 315 widebody aircraft.

Once the new aircraft enter in service, Emirates SkyCargo expects the available main deck cargo capacity to increase by 30%, thus enabling it to deploy the much-needed space into key markets and better serve the global customers.

With the staggered delivery of the new aircraft, Emirates SkyCargo will be retiring the older freighters, thus reinforcing its commitment to operate one of the youngest and most efficient fleets.

For more information, visit **www.emirates.com**



IndiGo Heralds New Era of Growth

Elbers also announced the launch of IndiGoStretch, a tailormade coupe-style, two-seat wide bay crafted to provide a relaxed and comfortable journey to redefine business travel in India.

IndiGo BluChip, the airline's much-awaited loyalty programme, also made its debut. To complement these advancements, its website and mobile application were revamped to deliver a seamless and user-friendly interface for customers.

For more information, call **+603-2145 8533** or visit **www.goIndiGo.in**



AirAsia to Welcome 75 Million Guests in 2024

AirAsia Aviation Group (AAG), which celebrated the recent 57th Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) Day, expects to see significant increases in its domestic and international frequencies to 3,281 flights weekly across the member countries.

AirAsia Malaysia (AK) has announced it will resume its four-weekly flight route from Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Da Lat (DLI), Vietnam on November 1, 2024 as part of its broader strategy to provide more affordable travel options within the region besides boosting tourism.

In line with this, its AirAsia MOVE, formerly known as AirAsia Superapp, recently signed an agreement with the ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA) to solidify the latter's support in terms of endorsement and member associations outreach towards its ASEAN Explorer Pass, the app's signature travel subscription product.

Launched earlier this year, the annual travel pass allows subscribers to explore the ASEAN region through AirAsia's network, enjoy hotel discounts and connectivity on-ground via AirAsia Ride for a full year from the commencement of its subscription date.

Bo Lingam, AAG Chief Executive Officer said, "We aim to welcome 75 million guests onboard this year, with half of these travellers expected to come from ASEAN."

AirAsia carried over 61 million guests in 2023, with over 33% of them travelling across ASEAN.

"We take great pride in championing the ASEAN Economic Community's vision of creating a single market and production base.

This will help reduce our costs by having common standards: one air-traffic-control system, one engineering system, open skies policy and common ownership.

As an airline, we truly believe in bringing the world to Asean and Asean to the world, we will continue to strengthen our presence in this dynamic region that is home to over 700 million people.

BO LINGAM

Chief Executive Officer
of AirAsia Aviation Group (AAG)

For the second half of 2024, AK will be launching two new routes, Penang (PEN) to Shenzhen (SZX) and Kota Kinabalu (BKI) to Shantou (SWA), thus bringing to a total of 33 routes to China. Starting on October 28, its PEN to SZX will operate four flights weekly while the BKI to SWA service, commencing on November 16, will be thrice weekly.

For more information, visit www.capitala.com



9 Air's Maiden Flight from Guiyang to Kuala Lumpur

The launch of 9 Air's (AQ) flight from Guiyang (KWE) to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) service on August 24, 2024 marks the first route from the Guizhou Province of China and the airline's debut to Malaysia.

Representatives from Malaysia Airports and Tourism Malaysia were present to welcome the inaugural flight.



A pioneer low-cost carrier in central and southern China with its main hub at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, AQ operates a fleet of 25 Boeing 737 series aircraft.

Since commencing international routes in October 2018, it is now connected to six countries, namely Japan, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Myanmar and recently Malaysia.

A result of the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Dato Sri Tiong King Sing's recent official work visit and sales mission in China, AQ's debut presents an opportunity to attract more tourists from second-tier cities in China besides strengthening the bond between Southwest China and Malaysia and leveraging the unique tourism offerings of both.



Since the introduction of visa-free entry for Chinese travellers to Malaysia from December 1, 2023, which has been extended now to December 31, 2026, this has spurred inquiries and bookings to the country.

As of June 2024, Malaysia welcomed 1,449,711 arrivals from China, up 190.8% compared to the same period in 2023, which saw 498,540 arrivals.

Using a B737-800 aircraft, AQ offers 189 seats in an all-economy class layout, with 12 seats in the first three rows designated as premium economy, which offers value-added services such as priority check-in and boarding along with bonus points and awards.

AQ also has an All-Inclusive Fare package, which offers food and beverage services plus increased checked baggage allowances.

Under its Promotions Every 9 campaign, which can be followed via the airline's official WeChat account, travellers can enjoy special fares starting from RMB9 on the 9, 19 and 29 of each month.

AQ's parent company is Juneyao Air which launched direct four-times-weekly flights between Shanghai Pudong and Penang on May 31, 2024.

For more information, visit www.9air.com

Upclose with Datuk Dr M Gandhi

President of Malaysian Association of Convention & Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (MACEOS)



A unique and immediate area of cooperation I envision is the collaboration with the three sub-regions bordering Malaysia. They are namely the BIMP-ASEAN sub-region comprising Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines that borders Sabah and Sarawak, the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMTGT) that borders the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia, especially Penang, Kedah and northern Perak while in the south, the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore (IMS) GT borders Johor and Melaka.

Under your leadership, you partnered with the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) during the latter's annual Malaysia Business Events Week 2024 (MBEW24) to launch the maiden EVENTXPO. Did it meet your targets at the end of this three-day event?

We are delighted that our collaboration with MyCEB exceeded our expectations. We recorded 3,100 professional attendees from August 19-21, 2024. In addition to the 500 B2B meetings, onsite meetings, networking and interactions among the attendees, both the speakers and exhibitors created an engaging atmosphere, thus strengthening the domestic BE ecosystem.

You mentioned about taking MACEOS to the next level in a structured manner. Would you care to elaborate on that?

I am blessed with a motivated, able and experienced executive committee (Exco) that was voted in together with me at the recent MACEOS annual general meeting. I believe the diverse and vast business experience among the Exco members shall be more effective if the organisational structure and business plans are structured in line with MACEOS Strategic Roadmap 2020-2030.

Under MACEOS Strategic Roadmap 2030, the association has moved beyond the recovery stage of the COVID-19 pandemic to economic development and nation building. Digital transformation has been cited as one of the key factors to the growth of BE industry. What are some of these transformation?

Our industry has been very welcoming to the employment of technology in improving the business efficiency and customer service. However, the next stage is utilising and improving data collection and analytics while transforming this into true value. This would entail industrywide investment, collaboration and learning. Cybersecurity concerns, data protection processes and upskilling of our human capital shall be key to this digital transformations.

Another contributing factor is human capital. What has been done to upscale the skills of our human resources?

We have a dedicated Vice President for Education who is spearheading and rolling out a structured education programme that is in line with the growth of our BE industry.

Datuk Dr M Gandhi, who considers himself at that wonderful age where experience meets enthusiasm, believes he has collected a few stories over the years to share. Described by others as a wise and humble man who is well respected not only in the business events (BE) industry but also in the other diverse fields he is involved in as Bumiat Holding Sdn Bhd Founder and Chairman.

Passionate about promoting kindness and using BE as a tool, he founded the concept of Kind Malaysia, an event that brings corporates and civil society for a greater good, he has been encouraging MACEOS members to embed this concept within their conventions and exhibitions following his appointment as the association's President effective May 27, 2024.

How have your past experiences of operating major business events (BE) overseas equipped you with your current responsibilities?

Over the last 25 years, I had the opportunity to operate and manage BE, including trade exhibitions throughout Asia and the Pacific region. My experience extended to the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) region as well as the larger economies such as India and China. These experiences have equipped me to take a strategic and longer-term view. I intend to bring the knowledge I have gained into developing Malaysia's BE industry as an integral component of the larger regional and international ecosystem.

Please share with us your plans with our ASEAN neighbours on promoting BE in the region.

When attracting global business to each ASEAN member, there is a need to leverage each other's strengths. While we do compete for some businesses, in a globally competitive business environment, I feel that by enlarging the businesses attracted to the region as a whole will make it more sustainable.

Digital transformation, international certifications, safety skills and business acumen are some of the programmes that are being rolled out as part of our capacity building objectives.

How many members does MACEOS have currently? Any plans to grow its membership, especially beyond the country's central region.

MACEOS currently has 180 corporate members representing the entire ecosystem. This includes professional convention organisers (PCOs), professional exhibition organisers (PEOs), venues, convention hotels, business events suppliers, state convention bureaus and other stakeholders such as educational institutions. Our intention is to increase the membership to 300 within the next several years and strengthen the chapters in East Malaysia as well as the northern and southern regions

How can BE contribute to the growth of the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia?

BE attract high value travellers, who stay longer, spend more and contribute to the economy. Many of the BE attendees are businessmen and professionals who come to Malaysia for the first time due to the events organised by our members. These attendees are potential investors who build our economy.

There have been instances of BE organised in Malaysia which failed due to poor publicity resulting in low visitors to the exhibitions and poor attendance at the conferences. What can be done to prevent this?

I must emphasise that Malaysia hosts some of the world's and region's leading events. Lead time and proper market research prior to the launch of BE ensure professionalism. MACEOS training and educational programmes are there to give the needed upskilling. We must adopt a comprehensive and strategic marketing approach.

This includes integrating digital, social and traditional media, forming industry partnerships, and starting promotions early. Optimise your event's online presence and use data analytics to refine strategies. Additionally, targeted outreach and early bird incentives will drive engagement and ensure a successful event.

What can be done to address the lack of large event venues in Malaysia?

Purpose-built exhibition and convention centres must be viewed as critical infrastructure for nation building. These venues require long-term planning on a multifaceted approach. Investing in the expansion and upgrading of existing venues is crucial to better accommodate major events. Additionally, fostering public-private partnerships can facilitate the construction of new, cutting-edge facilities.

Expanding venue development to include regional areas can alleviate congestion in major cities and broaden access. By enhancing our infrastructure and ensuring our facilities meet international standards, we can position Malaysia as a leading destination for large-scale events and attract global gatherings.

What are other challenges faced by the BE industry and how do you hope to resolve them?

The industry is experiencing robust growth overall. The challenges we currently encounter involve ensuring that our human resources remain consistently skilled and competent as well as establishing a continuous flow of resources equipped with training for upcoming expansion and new technologies. In a rapidly expanding environment, it can be easy to overlook long-term requirements such as infrastructure planning and the promotion of appropriate policies, along with fostering partnerships with neighbouring ASEAN countries and the significant economies of India and China.

To address these issues, MACEOS has initiated an advocacy programme to keep authorities informed about the growth trajectory of our sector, its requirements and the national advantages it presents.

MACEOS is also committed to maintaining ongoing collaboration and knowledge exchange with our ASEAN counterparts to facilitate regional progress.

What are the latest developments on the upgrading of the BE industry standards, especially with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry's Department of Standards Malaysia (JSM)?

The upgrade of our industry standards in Malaysia is making significant strides. MyCEB, in partnership with JSM and MACEOS, is developing new Malaysian Standards for PCOs, PEOs and event venues. These standards emphasize environmental, social and governance compliance, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Recent developments include draft guidelines presented during MBEW, which outline minimum requirements for convention and exhibition centres, as well as tiered criteria for PCOs and PEOs.

The guidelines, open for feedback until October 14, 2024, are expected to be finalised next year. This initiative aims to elevate professionalism, attract international events besides ensuring our venues and service providers meet rigorous benchmarks.

On MACEOS' sustainability efforts to reduce carbon emission, how do you reconcile with the increasing numbers of physical events being hosted post-pandemic?

This requires a balanced approach. We are committed to reducing carbon emissions by implementing a range of strategies, including promoting energy-efficient practices, encouraging the use of sustainable materials and integrating green technologies in our events.

Additionally, we are working with venue partners and suppliers to ensure that sustainability is a core consideration in their operations.

By prioritising eco-friendly practices and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility, we aim to mitigate the impact of increased physical events and continue advancing our commitment to sustainability.

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