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NEWS ANALYSIS

Event's success proves it is here to stay

Smooth running and strong turnout silence detractors and cement show's reputationBy **David Boey**, Defence Correspondent

DURING the opening day of the Singapore Airshow, an American defence contractor said he met one of his key clients here 'more times in one day than in three weeks' in Washington.



Mr Richard Kirland, president (South Asia) for United States defence

giant Lockheed Martin, was not alone in noticing the heavy hitters drawn to the first Singapore Airshow.

Industry expectations were met, as far as visitor credentials were concerned. Among the guests: 26 air force chiefs and senior officers from 41 countries, and 200 top airline executives, civil aviation chiefs and transport ministers.

Off the show site, the galaxy of stars from the air force and civil aviation communities ensured that the Global Air Power Conference and the Singapore Airshow Aviation Leadership Summit drew a powerful audience as well.

By all accounts, the six-day Singapore Airshow, which ends tomorrow, has been a resounding success.

HOT MEETING SPOT: Exhibitors had high praise for the networking opportunities with potential clients at the show. The turnout included 26 air force chiefs and senior officers from 41 countries, and 200 top airline executives, civil aviation chiefs and transport ministers. -- ST PHOTO: MUGILAN RAJASEGERAN


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Mr Walter Doran, president of Raytheon Asia, told The Straits Times the show had certainly met the company's expectations of getting to engage key customers.

GOOD TIME, IDEAL LOCATION

'It's a very good regional show out here in Asia. I think in terms of timing, it's good. It's a nice climate out here. It clearly wins the award for the best venue and best location.'

AIRBUS CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER JOHN LEAHY

Senior Boeing executive Joseph Song agreed, saying the show is among its top three, alongside the Paris Airshow and the Farnborough show in Britain. 'We put the highest priority and focus on these shows,' he said.

One advantage of being at the Singapore Airshow, exhibitors say, is that the organisers here stay neutral unlike in some other venues.

Pretty much all the exhibitors get 'face time' with high-level delegations here, said some airshow veterans. That is not always the case overseas, where organisers can arrange it such that the delegation swings by the stands of certain companies or countries, while others are avoided.

Another indicator that the inaugural show was worth the trip out here: Aerospace and defence executives had a busy week networking and cosying up to potential clients. To be sure, few customers visit an airshow and sign contracts on the spot.

Although much will be made of the US\$13.4 billion (S\$18.9 billion) worth of orders announced by show organisers, it is not a number industry officials pay much attention to.

The deals announced at any airshow would have been brewing for some time, so the value is more about nurturing new markets and looking to seal future sales deals.

Boeing's Mr Song was pleased with the networking opportunities presented with defence chiefs from the region.

'What a fantastic venue. If I spent all the money I spent this week just to be at the seminar, it was worth it,' he said of Global Air Power Conference.

Air force chiefs also said the seminar was time well spent.

General Carrol H. Chandler, commander with the Pacific Air Forces, United States Air Force, said of the pow-wow: 'It gives me the opportunity to meet people whom we'll potentially be working with in the future.'

Echoing a similar view, Air Chief Marshal Fali Homi Major, chief of air staff of the Indian Air Force, said: 'This is an excellent opportunity to meet everyone in this area.'

On the civil front, Singapore's standing as an aviation hub adds a lot of synergy to the airshow. This time, some 27 events tied to the lucrative maintenance, repair and overhaul, or aircraft servicing sector, were held in conjunction with the show. Such events offer stakeholders a chance to see first-hand how their investments here are shaping up, and keeps Singapore on the radar screen of budding investors.

But there can be too much of a good thing and the scheduling of conferences is one area the next show can improve on.

Mr Jimmy Lau, managing director of Singapore Airshow and Events, the show's organiser, conceded that the five conferences held on the sidelines of the show were too many and that the next show in February 2010 may have two major conferences to address the civil and military aviation sectors.

Exhibitors also said delegations packed the show site on the first or second day and that they would have preferred it if the delegations were spread out over the four days so that exhibitors would get to spend quality time with them.

Looking ahead, the North Asian market is an area that the Singapore Airshow could try to attract in stronger numbers come 2010. Chinese aircraft and defence companies tend to have an insular mindset, displaying their wares at China's Zhuhai Airshow every even-numbered year since 1996. The Singapore Airshow would score a coup if it could coax China's aviation industry to go beyond displaying glossy brochures on their product lines, to flying some of China's latest aviation offerings to the airshow.

Overall, however, the strong turnout and the smooth running of the four trade days of the show have silenced detractors who wondered whether the Singapore Airshow could do as well as the Asian Aerospace, after it moved to Hong Kong.

The show is here to stay. Strong industry support means it will not suffer the fate of other regional events like the Indonesia Air Show, last held in Jakarta in 1996.

Four companies, including US defence giant Lockheed Martin, took out a long-term lease on the show. The American multinational put down \$2 million for a chalet for the next 30 years.

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