

THE STRAITS TIMES

114 PAGES IN FIVE PARTS » MICA (P) 219/03/2006 TUESDAY, JUNE 6 2006

 A SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS PUBLICATION ESTABLISHED 1845 » 80 CENTS

Air crew training centre spreads its wings abroad

All set to open its first overseas centre in India, it is targeting China too

BY KARAMJIT KAUR
Aviation Correspondent

RIDING on Asia's aviation boom, a Singapore-based company staffed mainly by former Singapore Airlines (SIA) employees is spreading its wings and plans to open its first overseas training centre in India later this year.

The Little Red Dot Academy

started in October 2004 with a dozen trainers and just one airline customer, India's Air Sahara. It now has 30 core trainers working with cabin crew from three airlines. Besides Air Sahara, it trains staff from Vietnam's Pacific Airlines and Kazakhstan's Air Astana.

Contracts with three more carriers in the Middle East, Pakistan and South-east Asia are due to be signed soon, said chief executive officer Loh Sien Chi.

The company is cashing in on the growing demand for such services, as more airlines outsource non-core functions like training.

"We hope to have Little

Red Dots everywhere," said Mr Loh. "In India, we are working to open branches in Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata and Hyderabad."

China is next. "China and India are the two big growing markets where we want to establish our foothold."

More than half its trainers are former SIA staff, while the rest used to work with airlines like Cathay Pacific, Northwest Airlines and United Airlines.

Mrs Suman Chopra, vice-president (inflight services) at Air Sahara, which flies between Singapore and New Delhi, said: "For us, the strong SIA link was a big draw because it meant we were getting

quality training for our crew.

"We also didn't think it was productive or cost-effective to hire people on a permanent payroll for training purposes."

From just training cabin crew when it started, the company has moved into training ground-handling staff to do passenger and baggage check-in. To keep pace with its expansion, it has moved into a new office at Changi North's Mil-Com Aerospace Training Centre.

Said Mr Loh: "We are talking to companies which train aircraft engineers and pilots, so we can offer airlines a total training package."

karam@sph.com.sg