

# High hopes to host major business jet show here

Tourism board in talks with US organisers; aim is to have two major air shows here from 2008

By ARTHUR POON

SINGAPORE has plans to soar higher as a host of major air shows. It could be the site of two major air shows from 2008, instead of one.

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is in talks with aviation experts to attract United States-based National Business Aviation Association to host its Asian executive jet show here in 2008, The Straits Times understands.

The show — Asian Business Aviation Conference & Exhibition (Abace) — made its debut in Shanghai, China in August, drawing more than 2,200 participants from 50 aerospace companies.

Eleven business aircraft, ranging from US\$1 million (S\$1.69 million) to US\$45 million and popular with pop stars and corporate executives, were on display.

The three-day trade show is the only major Asian event focused solely on business aviation and will next be held in Hong Kong in February 2007.

Singapore is due to host the Changi International Airshow from 2008, after its predecessor Asian Aerospace — a joint venture between Reed Exhibitions and ST Engineering — lost the rights to hold the biennial aerospace show after next February.

While STB is keeping mum about any talks, the company behind the Changi air show — newly formed Changi International Airshow and Events, which is a joint venture between the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore and the Defence Science and Technology Agency — is keen to host the business jet show.

The chairman of the new company, Mr Lim Chin Beng, said: "This is a good proposal. Singapore has excellent potential to be a base for business



PHOTO: AP

**FLIGHTS OF FANCY:** Actor John Travolta, with wife Kelly Preston and daughter Ella Bleu in front of his private jet. Business aircraft at international air shows are popular with celebrities and corporate executives.

jets. Running the business aviation show, especially in odd years, makes economic sense because the Changi International Airshow will be run only in even years."

Hosting two air shows will better maximise the new exhibition facilities

being built on a 24ha site in Changi North, close to the Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal.

Another reason to bring the executive jet show and keep it here: It will coincide with the integrated resorts coming to town.

Private jets are popular toys for casino high-rollers who are able to wager millions of dollars each night, said Mr Logan Ravishankar, sole owner of MyJet Asia, which operates mainly chartered flights.

The Straits Times understands that the idea to make a pitch for the executive jet show came from industry veteran Prithpal Singh earlier this month.

"I suggested to STB that if it wants to bring the show here, no point getting it for one year. Instead, make the organisers an offer they can't refuse and secure it for the next 10 years," he said.

For now, no decision has been made by the US company behind the business jet show.

Speaking to The Straits Times from Washington DC in the US, Mr Dan Hubbard, the show's communications vice-president, said: "A host city has not been selected for 2008 at this time. The 2008 show may be located in the southern area of Asia, so that the event rotates each year between northern and southern points in the region."

Asked what he thinks of Singapore's chances of hosting the event, he replied: "We are looking for a city that is easily accessible, such as suitable exhibit halls, close proximity to an airport for static display and a good mix of hotel rooms.

"Singapore is a delightful city, but we have not made decisions about the dates or locations for Abace events beyond 2007," Mr Hubbard added.

Industry players say the plan to bring the executive jet show here will put Singapore on the world map for business aviation.

Mr Manfred Baudzus, director of business development in Asia-Pacific for Embraer, a maker of business jets, said: "While the market for business aviation in Singapore is still in its infancy, the selection of Singapore is likely to open up the business aviation market not only for Singapore but neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia as well."

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