

AirAsia boss Fernandez eyes Singapore Airlines

Malaysian budget airline AirAsia's ethnic Indian boss Tony Fernandez has said his long-term goal is to one day 'take over' Singapore Airlines (SIA), the national airline of the neighbouring city state.

The maverick entrepreneur revealed his company's ambitions at the end of a slide presentation at an event where he was conferred an award by Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak Thursday.

To the amazement of those present, he showed two pictures - one of aircraft livery and the other of AirAsia's new uniform for its stewardesses. He told his audience that he would name his new company Singapore AirAsia, The Sun newspaper reported Friday.

Fernandez kept the audience in stitches throughout his one-hour presentation, ending it with the remark: 'And this is the uniform the stewardesses on board Singapore AirAsia will wear.' He pointed to a picture of a smiling woman wearing a combination of the famous SIA baju kebaya and striking red AirAsia skirt.

While many in the audience laughed it off, aviation industry observers said it was a signal from Fernandez following news reports of Malaysia Airlines being in talks for a strategic alliance with British Airways and Qantas.

A Malaysian news portal said that owing to global economic pressures, the airline industry was going through a consolidation period, with talks of mergers, acquisitions and bankruptcies dominating the business pages.

At Thursday's event, Razak said he was proud of Fernandez's achievements, not only for his company but for the country as well.

AirAsia is rated as having done remarkably well in Southeast Asia and has begun flights to various destinations in India, catering mainly to the 2.6 million diaspora.

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