

BANGKOK, HONG KONG & MANILA

contract
security
Asian style



Some of the most exciting airport development projects of the early 21st Century are taking place in south east Asia. Hong Kong's Chep Lap Kok is already winning awards and both Bangkok and Manila are set to open new state-of-the-art terminals in the next few years. But it's not only about appearance as, behind the scenes, airlines, airport authorities and contract security companies are all taking security extremely seriously. **Philip Baum** travelled to the region to find out more.

It might seem strange to focus our attention on the Far East whilst the rest of the world's media concentrates both on conflict in the Middle East and the political repercussions on the protagonists' actions in the United States and Europe. Asia, however, is the area of the world where aviation is growing fastest and the region's civil aviation authorities are keen to ensure that war in Iraq does not impact on the economic benefits that go hand-in-hand with a healthy aviation industry.

In this report I highlight three airports that face the challenge of protecting their customers and assets, each one tackling the threat posed by the knock-on effects of the war in Iraq, together with some very specific regional threats. Hong Kong's tourist industry seems set to take a mighty blow from the effects of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), the pneumonia-style disease that has terrorised the local population and visitors alike, and caused concern to air passengers drawn together for hours in the unnaturally close confines of an aircraft cabin. Thailand has

well beyond the corridors of power in Washington. Yet the sense of crisis that pervades, from a security perspective, is positive as it is keeping all on their toes. Indicative of the sensitivity of the times in which we live, within hours of my leaving Manila, reports emerged that a bomb had been found at the capital's airport, identified by X-ray operators before being loaded onto a flight bound for Japan. The "bomb" was, in fact, a grenade-shaped cigarette lighter.

Manila

The Philippines' capital's airport was originally an American air force base, yet was turned over to the Philippine government in 1948. Since March 1982, the airport has been administered and operated by the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA). Two terminals, and with any luck a third one by mid-summer, serve domestic and international passengers.

Security, especially granted the political instability in the south of the country and historically negative airport sur-

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recently launched its "war on drugs" and this peaceful nation is also conscious of Islamic fundamentalist/separatist groups active in the south of the country. And, the Philippines has had to cope with numerous terrorist attacks in the last few years perpetrated by groups such as Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Indeed, Davao airport was bombed, seemingly by MILF, on 4 March killing 22 people.

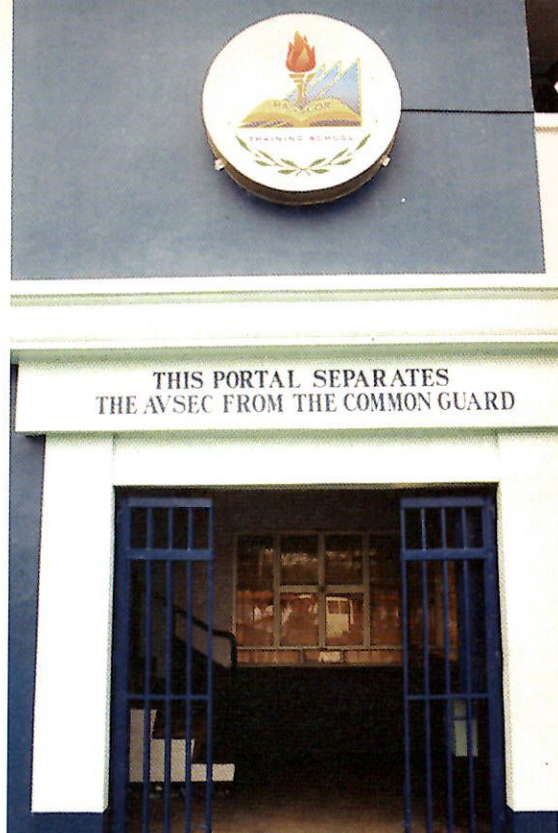
Not surprisingly, the region is somewhat jittery. The effects of the Bali bombing will not quickly be forgotten and the increased tension on the border between North and South Korea causes concern

veys conducted by the Federal Aviation Administration some ten years ago, is now being afforded the attention it deserves.

The authorities are extremely conscious of the fact that it was a Philippine Airlines flight that, on December 11 1994, was targeted by Ramzi Youssef as he tested his bomb for the intended Bojinka Plot. One passenger died as the aircraft cruised towards Japan. However, Manila Airport stresses that it would seem that the bomb was infiltrated during a stop at the southern Philippine city of Cebu.

Security in Manila is everywhere. Checks abound. The deterrent factor is strong. The Philippine National Police have overall responsibility and provide the specialist units such as the bomb squad. The Airport Police are responsible for perimeter security and access control whilst unarmed

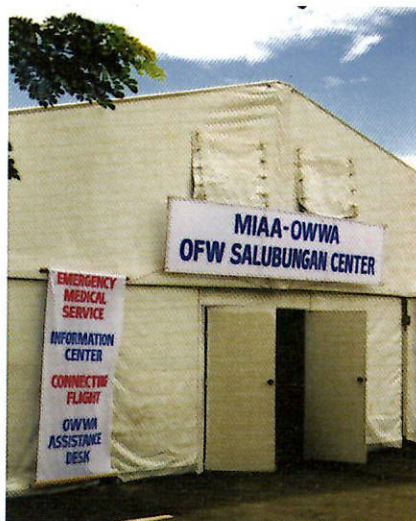
On facing page: A Lanting Security & Watchman Agency guard controls access to the passenger terminal at Manila International Airport



The entrance to PASSCOR's training centre indicates the value the company places on security training

contract security companies actually carry out the screening and guarding functions. The two largest such companies are the Lanting Security & Watchman Agency, which operates primarily on the landside areas, and the Philippine Aviation Security Services Corporation (PASSCOR), which operates airside.

By a strange Filipino law, no security agency can employ more than 1000 staff, thereby limiting their ability to become



MIAA has geared up for the possible homecoming of the 1.4 million Overseas Filipino Workers living in the Middle East.



PASSCOR's senior management including Lt.Col. Danilo Enriquez, President (left), Col. Alberto Quiaoit, Vice President (right) welcome Edgardo Manda, the General Manager of MIAA (centre) to the company's eighth anniversary celebrations on 21 March 2003.

monopolies. One way around this may be by the creation of a training centre. That is certainly PASSCOR's hope with its mission "to provide world class aviation security and allied services in order to contribute to nation-building through quality management and highly selected, trained, motivated and well-disciplined personnel".

PASSCOR was originally created as a subsidiary of MIAA, commencing operations in 1995. I was privileged enough to attend PASSCOR's 8th anniversary parade, a grandiose affair with police bands, presentations and anthems. Edgardo Manda, the General Manager of MIAA was the guest of honour, whilst staff motivational speeches and customer loyalty awards were given by PASSCOR's senior management - Lt.Col. Danilo Enriquez (President), Col. Alberto Quiaoit (Vice President), Victoria Evangelina Davies (Head of Operations) and Lorena Pangan (Head of Marketing).

Now the company is fulfilling all traditional aviation security functions and has developed its training centre, the gates to which bear the phrase "THIS PORTAL SEPARATES THE AVSEC FROM THE COMMON GUARD", indicating to students the value that is placed on their endeavours.

Recruiting the right people to perform security duties is fundamental to PASSCOR's success. The company has initiated a recruitment process during which candidates undergo IQ tests, drug tests and neuro-psychiatric clearance as well as being tested for physical fitness in a bat-

tery of tests equivalent to those required for recruits to the Philippine Military Service. All employees are subject to background checks that include the verification of references and previous employment and interviews with candidate's neighbours.

PASSCOR have based their approach to aviation security on the Securair model they witnessed in Hong Kong back in 1995.

The Middle East conflict has had a significant effect on Manila operations in recent weeks as the airport has geared up for the possible home-coming of a possible 1.4 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW)

employed in the region. (Overseas workers are the Philippine's biggest export, with there being some 7 million world-wide.) The airport has erected a tent and developed a hospitality programme to cater for large numbers of nationals who might yet arrive in their droves.

Bangkok

The investigation into the explosion on board a Thai Airways International B-737 two years ago is still ongoing. Whilst a spark in the fuel tank is a feasible explanation, many in Bangkok still feel that sabotage is the more likely cause. Whichever cause you chose to believe, the incident certainly brought about a re-focusing on security issues in Thailand. The country of smiles aims to preserve its image...

The Security Department of Thai Airways International, under the directorship of Pricha Sukchai, has made huge investment in recent years to better protect the nation's flag carrier and works together with the local authorities to ensure an appreciation of aviation security standards. Whilst I was in Bangkok, Sukchai was personally escorting a group of students from the aviation authority around the airline's operations as part of their educational programme.

Terrorism may not be the main threat, but passengers bearing malafide travel



Thai Airways security regime requires all cargo to be subjected to security clearance.

documents certainly tax the airline that has taken successful steps, through training and agency cooperation, to reduce the airline's exposure to fines. Bangkok is, after all, one of the forgery capitals of the world!

Thai Airways is, like Cathay, expanding its fleet; Thai is purchasing its new aircraft from indebted United Airlines. Conscious of the fact that al-Qaeda is known to have cells operating in Thailand, that tension exists on the border with Cambodia and the recently launched "War on Drugs" that has already resulted in the deaths of 1500 people, Thai Airways is far from complacent. In addition to the standard security measures provided by airports, extensive checks are made of every item being loaded onto Thai aircraft, from blankets to food trays and cleaning equipment to the crew themselves.

In Bangkok, primary responsibility for aviation security lies with the airport authority, although some of the security functions are sub-contracted to contract



Passengers are invited to dispose of knives, sharp and pointed objects before passing through the security checkpoint at Bangkok International Airport

security companies such as Guardair, Palang Roum and MPA.

Bangkok International Airport (BIA) is a division of The Airports Authority of Thailand, which also oversees Chiang Mai, Hat Yai, Phuket and Chiang Rai international airports, as well as the new Bangkok airport provisionally scheduled to open in 2005.

In each location the airport is respon-

sible for assigning security guards for controlling access to restricted areas, including vehicle access, the patrol of airport areas, securing high risk and Royal Family flights and the inspection of car parking areas. The security division supervises even the taxi service, albeit that the manpower is provided by Palang Roum.

Perhaps one of the most unique features of BIA is the golf course that runs alongside one of the main taxiways. Even people with no security background question the security implications of such a facility. Yet, as BIA management point out, the golf course actually belongs to the Royal Thai Air Force that has its own premises at BIA and does control access to his greens and fairways. Roll on the new airport!

Golf course aside, BIA is noticeably vigilant in its screening of passengers and airport employees. As one security consultant told me, "it is probably the securest airport in Asia", in part due to the phenomenal reputation of the Thai Police and their intelligence network.

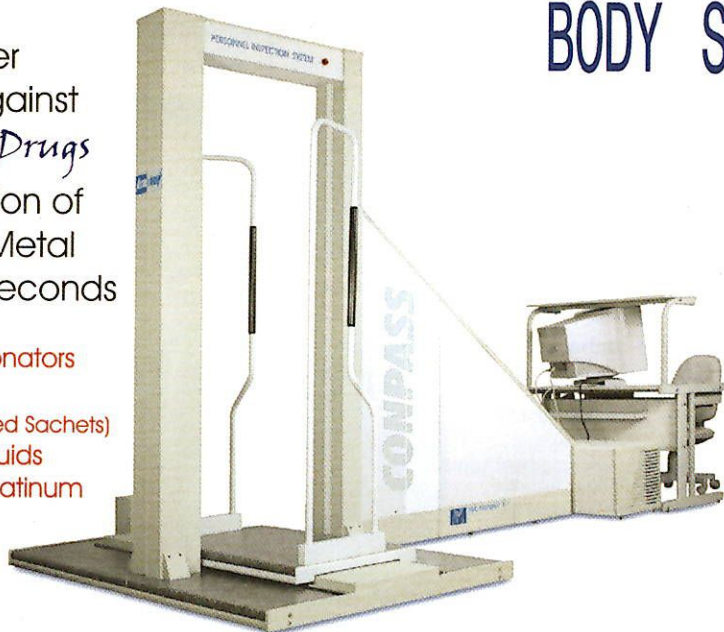


COMPASS

BODY SCANNER

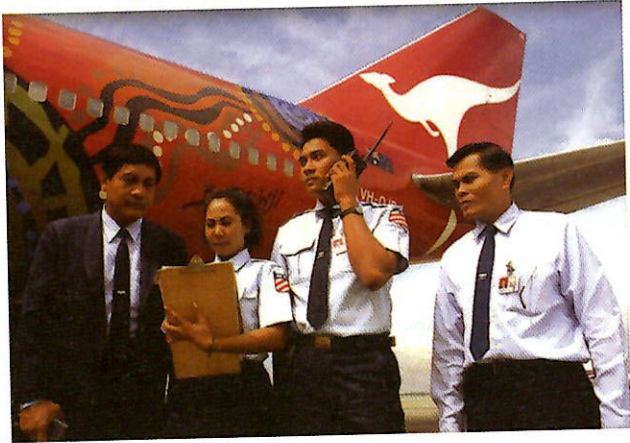
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MPA was established in 1955 and its staff provide services at airports in Thailand and Cambodia

MPA, one of the contract security companies operating in BIA, has been active in Thailand longer than any other security company. Established in 1955 as a branch

of local and expatriate management. Henrik Hansen, a Danish citizen, is the Chairman and has owned the company since 1985. President John Muller, originally from Seattle yet resident in the Far East since the Vietnam War, is a specialist in cargo and warehouse security. Prakt Charadit is MPA's Avsec Operations Manager in Bangkok and has over 22 years experience in airport operations and Sasithorn Nambouth oversees MPA's Avsec Customer Services programme.

'...Thailand, the country of smiles aims to preserve its image...'

of McFadden Protective Agency (hence the name MPA), the company initially served the US military in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and the Philippines. In 1978 it became a Thai regional company, providing training in all aspects of security as well as manned guarding services to embassies, oil refineries, banks, manufacturing industry and, of course, airlines.

Today it provides services at four airports in Thailand and Cambodia, employing around 480 staff (out of a total MPA workforce of 5500), most of whom are based in Bangkok, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. In Cambodia, MPA actually provides all aviation security services, whilst in Thailand they are one of a number of contract security companies. They expect to expand into Myanmar (formerly Burma) and the rest of Indochina in the near future.

Unlike many companies that provide only basic screeners capable of guarding and X-ray operations, MPA offers travel documentation checks, VIP escort and passenger profiling services. It also supplies equipment and is the regional distributor for PAC International, specialists in access control technology.

MPA is headed up by an impressive mix

Hong Kong

Chep Lap Kok oozes sophistication. Last year alone some 34.32 million passengers used Hong Kong's airport, a 3.8% rise on the previous year. 2.48 millions tons of cargo were transported and an average of 566 flights per day required security clearance of one form or another.

In the Kai Tak era, Securair, a subsidiary of Jardine and the Swire Group, was responsible for most screening functions. Yet, with the return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule and the development of the new Chep Lap Kok International Airport, security functions were transferred to AVSECO, a private company jointly owned by the Aviation Security Authority (the government bureau responsible for aviation policy) and the Airport Authority (a public corporation owned by the Hong Kong government). All the senior management are serving civil servants.

AVSECO has responsibility for access control, passenger screening and baggage screening, whilst also providing additional services to specific carriers. Whilst certain airports had to face huge challenges after the September 11 attacks, Hong Kong simply needed to up the tempo a little, primarily for reasons of deterrent and to satisfy customer demand for "increased" protection. 100% hold baggage screening had been an aspect of airport operations since the late 1980's. Just under 35,000 airport permit holders were already subject to background checks. So, it came down to an increase in the random screening of passengers (from 14% to 17%) and their hand baggage (from 4% to 14%), with even these ratios being raised on high threat days, such as the September 11 anniversary.



Florence Chan of Springboard Marketing (centre) joins the AVSECO senior management team, (left to right) Ho Tse Tong, Alan Lau, Rupert M. B. Cheung, Ng Wai-Kit (General Manager), Simon K. C. Hui, Alex Duthie

AVSECO's motto is "Training our staff for continuous improvement" and with 2800 employees, of which 1300 are screeners, that is no mean feat. Computer based training and certification has been in place since 1996 and all screeners are re-certified on a monthly basis; fail twice and you are off the X-ray machine for good. Threat Image Projection (TIP) has been introduced for checked baggage operations and is being considered for hand baggage X-ray as well. But motivation, AVSECO believes, is key. Every month six employees receive an award of an overseas tour (actually 24 employees travel together every four months) that includes a visit to a foreign airport to view its security system.

Touring the airport one cannot help but be impressed by the professionalism displayed by the AVSECO staff, their attention to detail, alertness and presentability and that can only be good for aviation security. AVSECO's General Manager, Ng Wai Kit, has inherited a force from the charismatic Sidney Chau (who recently returned to the Hong Kong Police) filled with a zest to succeed, but he has also managed to place his own mark on AVSECO and drawn together a management team that focuses on its people and, most importantly, their training.

The largest home-based carrier, Cathay Pacific, is equally confident in the security regime of the airport, although that is not to say it is complacent. Cathay keeps a close eye on security developments at Chek Lap Kok and as to be expected, does make its views known when it sees the need. Naturally, it is reinforcing its cockpit doors and is currently reviewing options for the deployment of in-flight CCTV, but confidence is high. There are 79 aircraft in its fleet, seven new aircraft on order and, in 2001, it transported some 11.3 million passengers and 704,154 tonnes of cargo to 60 locations in 30 countries. And, the number of disruptive passenger incidents is declining!

Cathay boasts its own purpose-built all-encompassing headquarters at Cathay City. The complex includes everything from a crew check-in, complete with a screening checkpoint operated by AVSECO and immigration controls, to an airline hotel for all crew and other Cathay employees and contractors requiring accommodation in Hong



AVSECO guards display the degree of professionalism that is a pre-requisite for effective aviation security

Kong. Cathay's John Lamond showed me around the facilities, with its state-of-the-art simulators, airline operations centre (notably following CNN for international developments that could have an impact on Cathay operations) and crew briefing rooms - an impressive facility, entry to which is also closely guarded!

Conclusion

Whilst the western media tends to focus on the avsec achievements of Europe and North America, the regulators would do well to look east and learn from their Asian counterparts. Security systems are effective, personnel trained and motivated, and there is a will to succeed ever-present. Security companies such as MPA, PASSCOR and AVSECO are all stressing training, training, training, and investing in it too! It's not only in Thailand, Hong Kong and the Philippines. SATS too

in Singapore (subject of another feature next issue) have gained an international reputation for excellence and other airports in the region, such as Korea's Incheon and Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur, are also security role models worthy of scrutiny. ☉



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