

Big Plans with Small Planes

Written by Ankur Bhatia

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Siddharth Verma has big dreams with small planes. Founded by him, Maritime Energy Heli Air Services Pvt. Ltd. (MEHAIR) is a pioneer and the only company in India to launch seaplane services. Started in the year 2011 MEHAIR is the vision of three entrepreneurs Siddharth Verma, SS Mann and CL Lakshmanan all of whom have years of experience in the aviation industry. With the introduction of small aircraft which can operate from runways and water-bodies within the course of the same flight, the company has ushered in a new and exciting mode of connectivity for the tourism industry in the country. The company's current operations are conducted at Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Maharashtra, and now entered into an understanding with Andhra Pradesh, Goa and Karnataka and Kerala. The service is now open to tourists, locals as well as the government and administrative bodies for connecting various destinations for leisure as well as time saving.

“India's water diversity makes the country an ideal seaplane territory and MEHAIR is proposing to expand its service to cover all the coastlines as well as the land-locked states which have suitable water bodies like lakes, rivers, back waters, beaches and dams” says Siddharth. The company is fully capable of operating amphibian on a turnkey basis for its clients.

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Siddharth Verma is a 42 year old first generation entrepreneur with a passion for aviation. Immediately after his post graduation in management, Sidharth joined the aviation industry and has been involved with almost the entire gamut of aviation. Today, Siddharth brings a rich and varied experience of over 20 years to this industry. Prior to launching MEHAIR, Mr. Verma was instrumental in setting up and running two of the largest helicopter companies in the Oil & Gas space in India. During this time, he successfully introduced some of the cutting-edge technology helicopter models for the first time in India. These models went on to become the backbone of offshore transport for the Oil & Gas industry in the country.



With a strong marketing background and a desire to continue creating new business ventures, he proceeded into the hitherto unexplored space of Amphibian seaplanes in India. Siddharth realised the business potential that India, with its 9,500 kms of coastline and numerous dams, lakes and other water bodies offered to such a venture. His vision is to place MEHAIR in the top five seaplane companies of the world and plans to have a total of 25 seaplanes in operations across India within the next 5 years.

The company's first aircraft was a single engine, 2 pilot + 9 passenger Cessna 208 Amphibian which is operating in A&N and the second aircraft is a single engine 1 pilot + 5 passenger Cessna 206 Amphibian being launched in Maharashtra (ex-Mumbai) from this month onwards. A third Cessna 208 A is joining the fleet in Jan'14 again for Mumbai operations. The company is also seeking to launch a twin engine, 2 pilot + 1 cabin crew + 18 passenger Twin Otter Viking 400 Series amphibian seaplane in Maharashtra post monsoon in 2014. MEHAIR will also

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launch Cessna 208A aircraft for its Mumbai operations from Jan, 2014 and a similar aircraft for Goa from March, 2014. The company is also looking to add a Cessna 208 A aircraft for Kerala post monsoon 2014 and a twin engine Viking 400 for Mumbai from Oct, 2014 onwards.

Sidharth admits that “the number or regulatory clearances required before launch of a new model or a new sector, plus the initial infrastructure capacity is a challenge for any seaplane operation in India”. Other challenges include getting trained pilots. This debt-cum-equity funded company is an ISO 9001, 14001 and 18001 OHSAS certified company. It has a team of highly experienced expat and local pilots who have worked both in India and across the globe. The company is registered with the manufacturer under the CESSCOM program and with the engine manufacturer under the engine maintenance program. It undergoes regular audits from the DGCA and has been operating safely and as per the CAR guidelines since Jan, 2011.

About their marketing strategies, Sidharth says that “the service is so far being promoted via its website, social media and media interactions so far (print and electronic). The company is soon getting into marketing through the various forms of communication routes like OOH, print, electronic and social media”.