



Open skies

Air traffic control manager Joe Chua thrives on keeping Singapore's commercial air space safe

Mr Chua is constantly on the lookout for global trends and developments in technology. PHOTOS: CAAS, FILE

by hazel tan

THANKS to unsung heroes like Mr Joe Chua Wee Jui and his team of air traffic control officers (ATCOs), Singapore's busy highways in the air remain open and accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

As an air traffic control manager at the air traffic services division in the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS), Mr Chua ensures that the "heart" of air traffic operations — the Long Range Radar and Display System (Lorads) III Air Traffic Control system — is always operationally ready.

"Our ATCOs operate this state-of-the-art system to manage the heavy demands of air traffic in our Singapore flight information region.

"As with all new systems, there are bound to be teething issues. My role is to ensure that these issues are resolved within the shortest time possible with minimal disruptions to air traffic control operations," says Mr Chua, who pursued his interest in aviation at CAAS as an ATCO after completing his national service in 1997.

Lorads III was operationalised in 2013. The \$300 million project features state-of-the-art designs and leverages cutting-edge technologies to enable ATCOs to handle air traffic safely and efficiently beyond the next decade.

Traffic lights in the sky

Mr Chua initially was unsure of what a career as an ATCO entailed.

"Prior to joining CAAS, Changi Airport control tower was the only thing that came to my mind when people mentioned air traffic control.

"However, after joining CAAS, I realised that tower operations are but one part of a huge machinery working in synergy for the provision of air navigation services," recalls the 42-year-old.

An ATCO's job is critical and highly challenging.

"ATCOs have to manage the numerous aircraft flying in the skies efficiently, providing air traffic control to ensure safe and expeditious flow of air traffic," says Mr Chua who was an operational ATCO for 12 years.

In 2010, he was posted to the air traffic management operation systems section as an air traffic control (ATC) manager. His ATC training prepared him well for the new role.

"Even though my current job responsibilities are different from that of an operational ATCO, my background in ATC adds value when we implement new or better technologies to enhance air navigation service," says Mr Chua.

"It is important for us to constantly har-

ness new technologies to improve our current capabilities to better accommodate the increasing aircraft movement and continue providing safe air navigation services."

In this role, Mr Chua is constantly on the lookout for global trends and developments in technology in ATC for greater efficiency and improvements in air traffic management.

Asked to name his biggest challenge on the job, he cites the transition of the old air traffic management system Lorads II to Lorads III.

"As with most new systems, especially for a system of this scale, there were initial implementation issues. It was a challenging period but, nonetheless, we managed to overcome all odds, and the system went live successfully in October 2013," he recalls.

A safe air zone

Even after 18 years on the job, Mr Chua is still enthusiastic.

"ATC is a long-term career option. There are just so many areas of ATC that one can contribute in. I still look forward to contributing to ATC for many years to come," he says.

Passion aside, Mr Chua says his colleagues and the work environment keep him going.

"In my division, my colleagues are sup-



Air traffic controllers work inside the Changi Airport control tower.

portive and we work extremely well together. We have gone beyond just being colleagues; the friendships forged along the way are something I hold dear," he says.

A major motivation for him is the opportunity to contribute to Singaporeans' safety in the air.

One of CAAS' roles is to ensure safe and expeditious flow of air traffic for all flights in and out of Singapore airports, and within Singapore's flight information region.

"Working in the public sector allows me

to make a significant contribution towards nation building. CAAS is the only air navigation services provider for civil aviation in Singapore, and there is nothing I would exchange for this experience as an ATCO," he says.

"Safety is a key component in the provision of air traffic services.

"Hence, knowing that I am actively contributing to the enhancement of this key factor itself is enough to motivate me in my daily work, and I want to continue building my long-term career in CAAS."