

Beginnings of an aerospace industry?

NST 23 OCT 1981

(P)
KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Malaysia could see the start of its own aerospace industry with the continued expansion and growing sophistication of the RMAF Aircraft Overhaul Depot (Airod) in Subang.

After a two-hour familiarisation tour of this high-technology maintenance centre, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the Defence Minister, said the depot had the potential to eventually grow into an aircraft assembly and servicing centre and manufacture parts not only for Malaysia, but also for the region.

He said Malaysia had the people with the intellectual capacity and manual skills to create an aerospace industry that could be as "good as any in any developed country."

"We can certainly match South Korea and Taiwan in this field," he said.

He had earlier commented that he was continually amazed at every inspection to find that the technical capability

Malaysia had was indeed extensive.

He was briefed on Airod by its commander, Col. (U) A. Shanmuganathan.

The Prime Minister said he had directed the unit to reprogramme its training capacity "so as to fulfil not 100 per cent, but 120 per cent of its requirement."

He said the government was willing to spend "a lot of money" for this as the excess skilled workers, technicians and engineers would not be a loss; they could be absorbed into the private sector.

"They'll be fulfilling a part of the social obligation of the government," he said. "MAS today wouldn't be flying so many Malaysian pilots if the RMAF hadn't trained most of them in the first place."

The depot, located on a 55-acre site at the northern end of the Subang airport runway, started operations in 1976 to fully support the RMAF in maintenance and repair of the highly sophisticated equipment it was buying.