

Dr M: Malaysia forging strategic alliances with aviation firms worldwide

Aerospace industry blueprint

By Ahmad A. Talib

LANGKAWI, Tues. — Malaysia is in the process of preparing a blueprint for its aerospace industry, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, adding that it was also forging strategic alliances worldwide towards this end.

The Prime Minister said although the entry point into the aerospace industry was in the area of aircraft maintenance, it was timely for Malaysia to embark on the manufacture of parts, engine and avionic components and training.

Dr Mahathir sounded out the Government's commitment to be more involved in the aerospace industry in his speech when he declared open the world's fourth biggest air show, the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (Lima '95) exhibition here today.

The colourful opening ceremony also included breathtaking aerial performance by some of the big exhibitors. Accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Dr Mahathir then toured some of the booths put up by 640 participants from 35 countries at the main hall and the accompanying tents.

Speaking at a packed Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre, the Prime Minister said: "The Government will give every support to the aerospace and aviation sector as an important component of Malaysia's industry. In this con-



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text, the Malaysian Industry-Government group for High Technology (Might) has been tasked to formulate an aerospace policy for the country.

"It will prepare the blueprint on how the investments, transfer of technology, research and development and joint ventures could best be implemented under the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000).

"It is also in the process of negotiating with several leading aerospace companies worldwide to form strategic alliances in the national aerospace and aviation industry."

The Prime Minister's note of confidence in the aerospace industry and his serious intention to see that Ma-

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Malaysian companies going into hi-tech sectors

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Malaysia becomes a player in the long run is well placed.

The worldwide annual turnover for the aerospace and aviation industry is estimated at US\$200 billion (about RM500 billion), with the Asia Pacific region expected to account for about 50 per cent of the global air transportation market by the year 2010.

Dr Mahathir said as local companies began to realise the opportunities to be found in the aerospace industry, more were coming forward to participate in it. Therefore, aircraft maintenance companies were no longer satisfied with just servicing the domestic and traditional clients, but were also aggressively marketing their services abroad.

Malaysian companies are also venturing into other hi-tech areas such as systems integration, simulator development and the manufacture of light aircraft and structural companies.

"Malaysia is anxious to prove to the world that it can manufacture aircraft components to the required standards of the acknowledged aircraft builders. In this respect, Malaysians are justifiably proud that the SME MD3-160, which was introduced at Lima '93, is now manufactured in Malaysia.

"Its first clients are the Royal Malaysian Air Force, followed by the Indonesian Ministry of Communication."

Dr Mahathir's push for Malaysia's deeper involvement in the industry is also reflected in the Government's support for the production of hi-tech composite materials. Its endorsement for advanced composite technology is seen in the setting up of a composite industrial park in Malacca.

After buying over the Australian-designed Eagle-XTS, a composite-based aircraft, some 30 Malaysian technicians and engineers have gained valuable exposure to advanced composite technology in aircraft components manufacture, sub-assembly and final assembly.

He said the Government was also keenly promoting a flying culture. It would support the formation of flying schools and clubs, including experimental aircraft associations, to encourage the public to be interested in learning to fly, and even own light aircraft one day.

He added that it was even envisaged that as Malaysians became more affluent, they would be ready for recreational, private, commercial and corporate flying, thus creating a domestic demand for general aviation aircraft.

"The challenge then is for both the Government and the private sector to explore the ways and means for making available low-cost aircraft, low-cost operation and maintenance, landing strips and aircraft parking facilities."