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Learn to maintain aircraft, aviation fraternity urged

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on the local aviation fraternity to help develop a "maintenance culture" among aviation enthusiasts in the country.

"I would like to remind all quarters that the aircraft is an unforgiving mode of transport.

"If we do not know how to maintain and use the aircraft well, we can get involved in fatal accidents," he said.

He was speaking at the launch of the Great Malaysian Air Rally in conjunction with the first Langkawi Oshkosh East Fly-In convention and exhibition to be held from Aug 4-8 at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Sungai Besi.

He also launched the first Rakan Muda Malaysian Experimental Aircraft.

Dr Mahathir said it was important for those involved in flying for sport, to go beyond merely knowing how to fly.

They should also know how to maintain the aircraft and ensure that their aircraft is in serviceable condition.

"This reminder is important for all of those involved in aviation irrespective of whether they are in general or commercial aviation, including the RMAF which possesses sophisticated aircraft like the MiG-29 and the F/A-18D.

"These airplanes are expensive and we (the Government) cannot buy many. If we do not maintain them well, we will not be able to keep them for long.

"It will also be dangerous and fatal accidents can occur. It would also result in the country losing costly investments," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was impressed to see a Canberra aircraft from the 1950s or 1960s still flying when he landed at a British Royal Air Force base recently.

He said he was told that the RAF intended to continue keeping the aircraft in serviceable condition until the year 2008. He added such aircraft would have been written off as old and unserviceable here.

"But here, even airplanes which are more recent than the Canberra are not serviceable. The reason why they can still fly the Canberra is because they know how to maintain the parts well.

"We would surely not be confident with aircraft such as the Canberra or the Lancaster bomber, the Spitfire and the Hurricane, which were used in World War Two (if they were to be flown)," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said when he went to the Oshkosh Fly-In convention in Wisconsin, the United States, he saw the Lockheed Super Constellation (built in the 1950s) which was still flying well and safe.

"We would have thrown it in the bin. But this shows their ability in maintaining old aircraft for they (the aircraft) can still be good if we know how to maintain them," he said.

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