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Only competent players should be in the aerospace industry

MALAYSIAN aerospace players should only be allowed to continue taking part in the industry if their activities are efficient, co-ordinated and up to international standard.

"The Malaysian Industry Government Group for High Technology has been directed to develop an inventory of aerospace industry players," its chief executive officer Dr Ahmed Tasir Lope Pihie said yesterday.

"Not everybody can be in the aerospace industry. Otherwise, what kind of standard and status will we project to the rest of the world?"

"There must be a serious audit of the seriousness and competency of those participating in the aerospace industry, as painful and undiplomatic as it may be," he said.

Ahmed Tasir was speaking at the 1997 Lima International Aerospace Conference at the Hotel Helang.

He was among the panelists at a session with the theme, "Developing Malaysia's Aerospace Industry -Capitalising on Future Opportunities."

Dr Ahmed Tasir also said Malaysia could not afford to delay development of its aerospace industry despite the present economic problems, especially as any investment made now would have long-term benefits.

He identified several aerospace sectors with huge business potential, such as travel, satellite communications and the maintenance, repair and manufacturing of either aircraft or their parts.

"But we must remember that we have always moved forward in partnership, and never alone. Therefore, the role of international players is very important."

Alluding to the National Aerospace Blueprint that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will launch today, Ahmed Tasir said the Government would have to provide a clear direction to guide further aerospace development.

On the need for skilled manpower to helm the industry's way forward, another speaker, Lt Jen (rtd) Datuk Seri Ghani Aziz, said it would not be enough to just have local universities setting up an aerospace unit, even if it were to be tied up with a foreign institution.

Ghani, a former Royal Malaysian Air Force chief, who is a member of the Malaysia Airlines board of directors, suggested expanding and opening up existing aerospace training institutions.

"The RMAF has trained personnel, and contrary to what is often believed, they are not inferior.

"They have the opportunity to be trained through hands-on experience with planes such as the F/A-18D Hornet maritime strike aircraft and the Hawk advanced jet trainer.

"All of this takes a lot of skill. I would suggest that the RMAF training establishments be upgraded to national institutions," he said.

Fellow speaker Lt-Gen (Rtd) Datuk Seri Mohd Yunus Mohd Tasi, chairman of Aerospace Industries Malaysia Sdn Bhd, also proposed setting up a specific aerospace institution that could serve both the nation and the region.

"This may take a large investment but we must remember that it would have a high strategic importance attached to it. To gain recognition, we should also set it up with a well-established foreign institution."

During the question-and-answer session, Mohd Yunus also noted that retiring personnel from the RMAF were usually not absorbed into the aerospace industry.

"They are a valuable, trained resource but they are not given the opportunity to join the industry after they leave. They should not be allowed to disappear," he said.

Another speaker, the chief executive officer of Integrated Technology and System Sdn Bhd, Prof Rahim Salam, said the flying culture needed to be spread beyond the present clique of the military and airline operators.

"They are a select group and we need to compare that to other countries where the young are exposed to the aerospace industry through aeromodelling and amateur flying clubs, for example."

Prof Rahim also noted that the quality of small and medium industry activities in the aerospace industry needed to be improved.

"Since they are serving medium and low-technology industries, they have become quite complacent. We need to turn them around, expose them to certification and re-educate them."

The three-day conference, organised by the Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute, was held in conjunction with this year's Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition.

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