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PM unveils National Aerospace Blueprint

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday unveiled the country's National Aerospace Blueprint, outlining six key initiatives to transform the nation into a global aerospace player.

The blueprint, drawn up by the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (Might) through its Might Interest Group in Aerospace, calls for:

- * the establishment of a national level steering committee called National Aerospace Council to oversee the development of the aerospace industry,
- * the setting up of a national aerospace coordinating body to act as a reference point for the various aerospace activities and investments,
- * the upgrading of the Department of Civil Aviation to Civil Aviation Authority to provide the industry to a monitoring as well as regulatory function in the areas of airworthiness, air traffic control and aerospace product/services,
- * putting in place a National Human Resource Development Programme to ensure that the quantity, skills and costs of personnel is adequate and competitive,
- * the establishment of Malaysian Agency for Space Administration (Masa) to strengthen Malaysia's entry into the space sector, and
- * the formulation of a national procurement policy which emphasises on local products/services and technology to ensure sustainable economic development and reduces import and financial outflow.

The blueprint was endorsed by the Cabinet last September 17. Might drew up the blueprint following consultations and dialogues between key players in the aerospace industry, regulatory agencies and related government agencies.

Dr Mahathir, speaking at the launching of the blueprint in Langkawi yesterday in conjunction with the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (Lima) 1997, said the aerospace industry is very important to the overall development of the country.

The industry itself encompasses so many sub-sectors from aviation to space and overhaul and maintenance activities to the manufacturing of a whole aircraft. It is also regulated and integrated and support those companies which are already established and possess a strong reputation.

"The aerospace industry cannot afford to be too divergent and fragmented. It is imperative that the industry adopts the national vision as its main thrust, and approaches the aerospace development tasks on a consolidated basis.

"This will provide a nationally consistent framework for identifying and evaluating key initiatives to be developed," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the National Aerospace Council will make key decisions in the areas of directions, priorities and strategies for the industry.

The council, which may see him and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as chairman and deputy chairman respectively, will adopt the Smart Partnership principles with the participation of leaders from both the public and private sectors.

The Prime Minister said in addition to the Council, the Government also supports the idea of a national aerospace coordinating body to act as "a reference point for the various aerospace activities and investments.

"The new body will consolidate the current national initiatives in the

aerospace sector and to further spearhead Malaysia's involvement in the industry.

"It will become the reference point for the managing of offset programmes and act as an intermediary for local and foreign interests in the industry."

Dr Mahathir said the National Human Resource Development Programme will take into account the various categories of labour required in the aerospace industry such as toolmakers, aircraft engineers, test pilots and system analysts.

"In addition to that, Malaysia hopes to establish a premier educational centre for aerospace which will serve the domestic as well as the regional need for education and training," he said.

The Prime Minister also said for the successful implementation of the key programmes, the industry must be equally supported by policies which are both rationale and enhancing.

The National Procurement Policy is important in the procurement of, among others, military equipment, privatization projects and offset programmes.

"The aerospace industry houses the most complex core technologies which are applicable to other industries and provide critical technologies for the future.

"It provides a gateway to technological acquisition and therefore it is essential that these technologies acquired through procurement and offsets will help the nation to gain access to a foreign market and fully realise our national competitive advantage."

He added that the focus of the recommendations in the blueprint is on the Government because it sets the legislative framework and policy.

"However, the success of the industry will be a responsibility that goes further than the Government. Action and participation is required by all the stakeholders.

"If we can achieve all that is set out in the blueprint, Malaysia will have an aerospace industry that will be globally-competitive and widely acknowledged as what has been achieved by our electronics and automotive industry," he said.

Might joint chairman and MIG Aerospace chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, who is also the executive chairman of Malaysia Airlines, said the aerospace industry will ensure that recommendations in the blueprint will be translated into a workable programme.

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