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Stress on maintenance, aviation sector urged

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants the aviation industry - general, military and commercial sectors - to enhance the culture of maintenance as it will help reduce cost and boost safety.

He said unlike other modes of transport, flying an aircraft is a mean of transportation that is not that forgiving, where most accidents result in loss of lives.

"Those in the aviation sector must inculcate a culture that stresses on very detailed maintenance. Everything is important when it comes to aircraft," he said at the launching of two aviation events at Sungei Besi in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The events are the flagging off the Great Malaysian Air Rally '97, which is held in conjunction with the Asia First Fly-In Convention and Expedition, and Malaysia's experiment kit-plane, ERM.

Dr Mahathir said the observance of this culture also includes the Royal Malaysian Air Force which owns sophisticated aircraft like MiGs-29 and F-18s.

"These (the aircraft) are expensive and we do not have the luxury to buy many of them. Any accident involving such aircraft not only means loss of lives but also loss of investments," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he had the opportunity to visit a station of the UK Airbase recently, where the culture of maintenance was strongly displayed.

"I am impressed that they can still fly the Canberra aircraft which was built during the 1960s. And they believe that they can still fly such an aircraft until the year 2008.

"Due to their strong maintenance culture and know-how in maintaining the mechanical parts, they can fly these aircraft as if they are new. In our case, we may regard these aircraft as too old to fly. Ours which are even newer than these are grounded," he added.

On the two events, Dr Mahathir said they are very relevant to the development of aviation spirit among Malaysians.

"Both activities will attract interest towards flying as a recreational activity among the young and the old. With interest in aviation, we can move the country's aviation sector one step further," he added.

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