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LEAD Mahathir-Aerotiga

"AEROTIGA", ANOTHER INDUSTRIALISATION MILESTONE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described the exportation of Malaysia's first two-seater plane -- the "Aerotiga" -- to the United States as another milestone in Malaysia's industrialisation.

Malaysia has gone into many industries successfully, including the automotive industry, although many had doubted its ability in producing auto vehicles, he said when launching the maiden delivery of the Malaysia-made SME MD3-160, ordered by the US.

The ceremony was held at the premises of the aircraft manufacturer, SME Aviation, in Subang near here.

The SME MD3-160 is a two-seater trainer-cum-recreational-cum-aerobatic aircraft.

"Now we are producing aircraft and it is very different from producing cars and automobiles because if it fails, the consequences are very serious for whoever happen to be in the aircraft or even on the ground," said Dr Mahathir.

The standard required for the construction of aircraft is far than that of producing anything that is anchored to the ground, he said, adding that aircraft manufacturers should maintain the highest quality of the aircraft for continuous efficiency.

"We can't afford to fail, we have to be very precise, very accurate and maintain a very high standard. But the ability to achieve this standard is a measure of the culture that we are trying to develop in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has to develop a culture that places very high priority on the highest quality.

"Quality is not something that is static. All the time quality must improve and we must always try to improve on whatever we have achieved," he said.

In the aircraft industry, one must appreciate this not only in the manufacturing and production but also in the maintaining in the aircraft, he said, adding that the government wished to develop a culture that places highest priority on aircraft maintenance.

"If we can maintain aircraft over a prolonged period, if we can maintain aircraft which should really go out of service, if we can keep them flying and flying well, then we could claim to have mastered the art of maintaining such sophisticated equipment as aircraft are," he said.

Citing an example, he said when he was in Britain last year, he noticed that aircraft which should have been written-off were still being used and were in good condition due to proper maintenance.

"I have seen speed-fires manufactured during the last war some five years ago. It shows the degree of love that those people have on the aircraft so much so that they can maintain such old aircraft in good flying condition even up to now.

"This is result of a certain kind of culture that we in Malaysia have not yet acquired. If we want to be an industrialised nation, we have to acquire and develop this culture.

"We must develop a love for mechanical things sufficiently to work and ensure that whatever we have under our touch will remain in perfect condition," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that over time those involved in the

aircraft manufacturing in the country would appreciate and develop such culture.

He also said Malaysia should not be too ambitious in wanting to produce large and sophisticated aircraft, because the country's progress should be in tandem with its capabilities and that of its people.

"When we are able to acquire such capabilities, only then do we proceed," he said.

The prime minister said it would be better for Malaysia to just produce components in the case of large aircraft.

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