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Local aerospace firms urged to work together

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THE Government wants local aerospace companies to work together, probably through a consortium or one major company, to avoid duplication of activities pertaining to the development of the industry.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government believes that by bringing all the companies together, their activities can be coordinated and operated efficiently with the hope of boosting the national aerospace industry.

"We are trying to bring all aerospace companies together so that we do not waste efforts in duplicating where each one of them does the same thing.

"Thus, they will now be brought together ... that is what we hope to do. It may be through a consortium of company or under one company," he told newsmen after officiating at the three-day Heli Asia '98 exhibition in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was asked on the latest development concerning the blueprint of the country's aerospace industry which he unveiled in Langkawi in December last year in conjunction with the fourth Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition.

Dr Mahathir, who is also First Finance Minister, was also asked on Malaysia's aspiration to develop and manufacture its own helicopter.

"It is our ambition. We cannot do it today or tomorrow but probably in the future. We will try at a small scale first by trying to get foreign technology.

"We will try to request for an offset programme whenever we purchased helicopters so that we will be able to get the latest technology in this industry," he added.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Mahathir said the Government welcomes any move by foreign aviation companies to set up their manufacturing base in Malaysia, including production of wide range of components.

"We in Malaysia welcome globalisation and technology. We are ready receivers of it and I appeal to the big names in the international helicopter industry (to set up manufacturing base in Malaysia) as we wish to develop further our aerospace and aviation businesses.

"We can promise you the necessary support base of engineering skills that makes this possible," he said, adding the Government is looking forward to seeing that the Heli Asia exhibition will one day feature made-in-Malaysia helicopters.

Specifically, Dr Mahathir said, Malaysia believed that there is a growth market for helicopters and components of the product.

"We are looking at an unusual, not to say unique craft, with a wide range of specialised uses, some special to this kind of aircraft only. This can be brought home to us in very forcible and dramatic ways," he said, citing for example how helicopters were used efficiently in fire-fighting operations in Florida, the US, recently.

In Malaysia, Dr Mahathir explained how important the helicopters were in tackling the haze problem which was caused by forest fires in a neighbouring country.

Apart from this, he said helicopters are also used in search and rescue operations where no other craft could get in so close to the disaster areas.

"There was one occasion last year when we were indebted to the unique

properties of the helicopter.

"Its suitability for search and rescue operation was amply demonstrated in lifting to safety the victims of a climbing expedition on Mount Kinabalu by the Royal Malaysian Air Force," he said, while describing helicopter as a very versatile machine, with a multiplicity of uses.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia, where parts of the country are still fairly inaccessible, will find the helicopters invaluable, from flying doctor service to political campaigning.

"We have extensive oil and gas operations offshore to which access is again most often by helicopter. Its uses in reconnaissance work are also an accepted part of defence and military operations, while increasingly it is used for commercial transport," he added.

A total of 69 companies and organisations from 17 countries are taking part in the exhibition. There are also seven helicopters showcased as static display at the exhibition.

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