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Export of Aerotiga to US shows our capability: PM

AFTER carving its name in the competitive world automotive sector, Malaysia is now all geared up to take on another area - the aviation industry.

The export launch of the locally-made Aerotiga aircraft to the US yesterday was more than a mere promotional ceremony. It signals that Malaysia has acquired the needed expertise and technology to be a key player in the sector.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the launch showed that Malaysia has met the various conditions and obtained the numerous aviation certificates to export aircraft.

"That we can export to the US shows that we have achieved world standards. We know the US is the area where big and small planes are produced," he said at the launch in Subang, Selangor yesterday.

Also attended the historic event was Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, his deputy Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam, and Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar.

Describing it as another milestone for the country, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has gone into many industries and has been successful. These include automotive and manufacturing.

"In the automotive sector, we have been successful although they are sceptics who have their doubts. Now, we are in the aircraft exporting business," he added.

Aerotiga is the first made-in-Malaysia aircraft to be fully certified for export to the US. It is a very significant development in Malaysia's aviation industry.

Firstly, it typically took about eight years from programme inception to full maturity for a light aircraft project. But the Aerotiga manufacturer, SME Aviation, only took five years.

Secondly, with the export of these first two Aerotiga aircraft to the US, SME Aviation has now paved the way for Malaysia to exercise the Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement (BASA), enabling penetration of the US aircraft market with other made-in-Malaysia aircraft of up to 9-seat capacity.

Malaysia signed the BASA with the US in 1996. It was the first country in Asia and the fifth in the world to do so.

The first two Aerotiga aircraft are now ready to be shipped to the US, where SME-Aero Inc - a joint-venture company in Tallahassee - will deliver the aircraft to the customer.

This will be followed by further aircraft deliveries to the US in 1999 and beyond. The US, the biggest market in the world for this category of aircraft, is expected to purchase more than 100 Aerotiga aircraft the next three years.

The Aerotiga is a two-seater all-metal airplane ideally suited for training, leisure and aerobatics flying. The aircraft was originally designed by MDB Flugtechnik AG of Switzerland. It incorporates many innovative features, notably its modular construction with interchangeable airframe parts and honeycomb bonded wings and control surfaces.

The aircraft has a forward-sliding plexiglass canopy, providing for excellent visibility and access to the cockpit. It has fixed landing gears and is powered by a Lycoming O-320-D2A engine of 160 horsepower with cruising speed of 130 knots.

Its side-by-side stick controls facilitate good handling for training purposes, and excellent response for aerobatic manoeuvres.

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