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Mahathir-helicopter

USE M'SIA AS MANUFACTURING BASE, MAHATHIR TELLS HELICOPTER-MAKERS

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has called on the big names in the international helicopter industry to look into the possibility of manufacturing their products in the country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the offer was in line with Malaysia's wish to develop further its aerospace and aviation industry.

"We can promise you the necessary support base of engineering skills that make this possible," he said when opening the Heli-Asia '98 exhibition at the Mines exhibition and convention centre in Sungai Besi here.

He said Malaysia was looking forward to the day when such an exhibition be organised to feature made-in-Malaysia helicopters.

Over 100 exhibitors from 35 countries are participating in the three-day exposition of helicopters for both civil and military operations. It offers manufacturers and suppliers access to both markets in the biggest such promotional event in the Asia Pacific region.

Dr Mahathir said there is a growth market for helicopters and helicopter components.

"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," he said.

He cited the devastating forest fires in Florida where helicopters configured for fire-fighting operations were in the forefront in the massive damage control effort.

He said Malaysia too had good cause to appreciate the role of the helicopter when it became victim of haze caused by forest fires in a neighbouring country last year.

"Happily, as you will have already experienced, there have not been a recurrence of the problem this year. There is no haze but blue skies and good Malaysian sunshine to greet our visitors," he said.

Other than its suitability for search and rescue operation, the prime minister also highlighted the helicopter's multiple uses.

"Malaysia, where parts of our country are still fairly inaccessible will find the helicopter invaluable, from flying doctor service to political campaigning," he said.

Helicopters are also used extensively in offshore oil and gas operation as well as for defence reconnaissance and other military operations.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said efforts were underway to bring all the local aerospace companies together to avoid wastage in duplication of work.

A consortium of such companies might be formed for the purpose, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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