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Islamic-Aircraft

D-8 DEVELOPS LIGHT AGRICULTURE AIRCRAFT

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- The group of eight Islamic developing countries (D-8) have developed a prototype light aircraft for use in agriculture, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar announced today.

He said the aircraft which was scheduled to undergo its first test flight in September in Turkey represented significant progress by the project-oriented grouping despite being set up only 16 months ago.

"Malaysian aerospace firms can supply components and spare parts including tyres, aircraft frame and avionics to the project," he said during a briefing on the upcoming second summit of the D-8 countries in Bangladesh.

With Malaysia's quest towards becoming a service centre for the aerospace industry in the region, it could contribute significantly to the project, one among six identified by D-8 at its last summit and assigned to Turkey.

"This is something not far-fetched, we are catalytic in nature," he said of the young grouping which had come in for criticism that it would degenerate like many others into a talk shop.

"We only identify and accept projects that can be implemented and are manageable," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is among the leaders who firmly supported the formation of the D-8 and is expected to leave on Sunday for the two-day summit beginning March 1 in Dhaka.

It would be preceded by the senior officials and foreign ministers meetings. Syed Hamid leaves on Friday.

He said Malaysia, which was assigned the Islamic finance and banking sector with emphasised on the Islamic insurance or Takaful business, had now been asked by the other members to present a paper on retakaful or Islamic reinsurance.

This stems from its success in establishing joint-venture takaful schemes, such as in Indonesia through Syarikat Takaful Malaysia Bhd, with the latter also having helped set up a takaful company in Brunei.

Even non-OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) members such as Brunei, Sri Lanka and South Africa had shown interest, he said.

In Sri Lanka, the first takaful company was incorporated with Malaysian technical and management assistance.

Following the success of the three-day seminar here in April last year to foster the setting up of Takaful schemes including joint ventures, he said Malaysia would continue to help organise similar seminars and training courses.

With over 800 million people among the D-8 countries, there was immense scope to develop the takaful business, "but we need to utilise the potential of each country so as to foster greater interest in it," he said.

Syed Hamid also highlighted the potential for increased trade through greater facilitation by reducing excessive procedures.

For instance, of Malaysia's total trade amounting to RM515 billion last year, D-8 countries accounted for over RM17 billion or only 3.2 percent, he said.

He said that other priority sectors identified by the D-8 at the first summit in Istanbul in June 1997 were trade facilitation, which was assigned to Egypt, and poverty alleviation and human resource development (Indonesia).

Agriculture was also identified with emphasis on aquaculture (Pakistan) and telecommunications with Iran assigned to help coordinate the setting up of a data bank network.

Syed Hamid said that the summit would come up with a "Dhaka Declaration" which would focus on greater cooperation among developing Islamic countries via concrete projects.

-- BERNAMA

MR DVS AAM