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The promise of aerospace

IT is trite to say that today's economic complexity and challenges are markedly different from those in the past. The technological revolution is intensifying, information technology is fast expanding and e-commerce is rapidly growing. But in keeping up with such paradigm shifts, the Government needs both boldness and willingness to venture into new arenas and, more than often, to penetrate areas long considered as the exclusive domain of others.

This will to dare, try and win is shown in the country's participation in the aerospace industry. The economic case for this industrial involvement rests on the premise that it is a new growth industry and more importantly, it will also hasten the nation's efforts in increasing its competence and capability in high technology businesses. This transfer and build-up of knowledge among the people is a true economic benefit which should be applauded and supported by all.

As in the development of some heavy industrial projects, the Government has taken a pro-active role from the beginning to ensure the unobstructed growth of the aerospace industry. It is not a farcical exercise. The industry has made a significant progress, especially over the past two years, where it has achieved international recognition and orders for the locally-made parts of over US\$40 million (RM152m).

More recently, eight international aerospace companies such as Rolls Royce Plc, Boeing, Hamilton Sunstrand and others are committed to using the proposed Subang International Aviation and Aerospace Park as their regional component manufacturing and overhaul facility centre. This augurs well for the nation's effort to be the leading player in the aviation and aerospace industry in the Asia Pacific region. It will serve as an added catalyst to fuel the growth of the industry as it is positioned to be a base for the design and manufacturing of high-tech and high-value aerospace parts as well as a technology centre for research and development and a training centre for skilled aerospace manpower.

Doubting Thomases will, of course, ask whether the country has the capacity to position itself as an aerospace and aviation hub. But the co-operation with the world's biggest aerospace players should ensure us of a faster transfer and diffusion of technology.

As observed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, aerospace is a very technology-intensive industry and is suitable for a nation with a fast growing skilled labour force. More than its impact on the country's economic growth, it will allow the country to establish a foothold in yet another technologically competitive field.

From the domestic perspective, this industry involves the most complex core technologies which are applicable to all other industries and provide critical technologies for the future. It is an investment in the nation's future whereby wealth is created not only for the shareholders, their employees and the small-and-medium scale industries linked to these businesses but for the communities in which these businesses operate. More paramount, it is also an investment in the country's technological might and future competitiveness.

It is a symbiotic relationship with sectoral linkages transcending time and space. The Government has shown the way. Now, the private sector must take the Government's role to lead in developing this industry.

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