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AEROSPACE  
MALAYSIA TO BE MAJOR AEROSPACE COMPONENTS MAKER

By: Ghazemy Mahmud

NAGOYA, June 6 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is poised to become a major aerospace components maker within the next five years and grab a chunk of the high technology business, said SME Industries group managing director Tan Sri Ahmad Johan today.

He said the industry would start to shift into high gear when SME Aerospace (SMEA), a subsidiary of the group, finalised a contract worth RM200 million to produce Boeing 767 parts for a major international aerospace concern by the end of the month.

Ahmad, who is also president of Airod, said this seven-year contract would be boosted in the next couple of months by another manufacturing contract worth RM700 million with the same UK-based company.

"If negotiations are successful, this job involving the construction of the complete wing structure of a newly-designed jetliner, would be one of the biggest to be undertaken by SMEA," he told a briefing for officials of Yamazaki Mazak Corporation here.

The briefing is ahead of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's arrival here tomorrow to begin a week-long working visit to Japan.

After arriving from Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir will tour Mazak's high-tech cyber facilities here where he is scheduled to witness the signing of agreements for SMEA to acquire computerised tooling machines for the production of aircraft parts.

This is not the first time the Malaysian company has produced precision aircraft machined parts for it has made components for the Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft under a smaller contract with Shinmaywa of Japan two years ago.

For the wing project, Ahmad said, "SMEA is the front runner among the five component manufacturing countries selected by the UK airframe manufacturer."

The move into the aerospace industry commercially was the brainchild of Dr Mahathir, he said, which began in earnest about 15 years ago with the privatisation of Airod, a government-owned aircraft maintenance facility.

With the success of the recently concluded restructuring of Malaysia's aerospace industries which grouped some 20 related companies, Ahmad said, "We have already acquired the skills and will be moving to a higher level of technology.

"We have the best technology, skilled workers well-versed in English in this field, low cost of production and a politically stable climate."

Dr Mahathir is an ardent proponent of the transfer and acquisition of high-technology for local indigenous development covering the whole gamut of aerospace, information technology and multimedia to propel Malaysia's development forward.

During his stay, Dr Mahathir will visit the high tech plants of other multinationals in Tokyo and elsewhere.

Tooling machines are considered to be "mother machines" and are the key to any high-tech industry as they are used to make precision parts, work pieces and moulds which in turn are used to make a variety of products.

Mazak vice-president Tony Yamazaki in an interview here said he would like co-operation in technology with Malaysia to be enhanced in the coming years, especially with the country's on-going economic rebound after coming out of the recent financial crisis.

He said the proposal for the setting up of a production plant to make specialised tooling equipment was being negotiated.

On the development of high-tech industries, he said co-operation with the high-tech sector in Malaysia would be continued but stressed that his company would like to assist in education which should also be given importance.

Besides the academic excellence of engineers, such precision industries needed the key support of a skilled workforce in the factory, well-trained in the use of modern computerised machines, he said.

Mazak, with plants in UK and the United States, is the designer and maker of one of the most modern tooling machines in the world utilising the latest IT and multimedia technology. -- BERNAMA

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