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Mahathir-Aircraft

ASIAN COMPANIES CAPABLE OF MANUFACTURING AIRCRAFT, SAYS PM

By: D. Arul Rajoo

OSAKA, Jan 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Asian companies have the capability and high technology to produce aircraft like the ones produced by Boeing and Airbus.

He said that a proposal for such a venture should be given attention and its benefits should be studied in view of the fact that Asian nations like Malaysia had already ventured into the field of aerospace while Japan was capable of producing various sophisticated goods.

"Their proposal is to produce a medium-range aircraft for the future. I am confident that more people will be using aeroplanes in the future and we will need a cheap transport system," he told Malaysian journalists covering his visit to Japan, here.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the proposal by Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara during a Fuji Television Network teleconferencing where he was a panel member with two others.

Ishihara proposed that Asian cities cooperate to produce aircraft so as not to be too dependent on Boeing and Airbus which now monopolised the aircraft manufacturing industry.

The prime minister also said that Malaysia was prepared to be the outsourcing base for big industries like electronics and aviation and also welcome small Japanese industries wishing to move to Malaysia.

For example, he said, there were about 5,500 small industries in the Ota prefecture in Tokyo, producing various goods like rocket and aircraft components but now facing a shortage of workers.

"They are normally owned by individuals, sometimes with only two or three workers. Now there are problems as their children are not interested in continuing with the business," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that suitable industries could be moved to Malaysia as support industries as they do not produce goods for end-users.

"We already have vendors for Proton. Maybe we can supply the electronics or aviation industries like the various types of instruments and meters...these big companies do not produce but outsource," he said.

On his visit to the Sharp Corporation's Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) panel plant in Tenki City, Dr Mahathir said that he had asked the company to increase its investments in Malaysia.

He said that at present, Sharp contributes almost 6 per cent of Malaysia's total exports and an increase in investments would certainly upgrade the country's economic performance.

Asked on Sharp's reaction to his proposal that the company sets up the high technology LCD panel plant in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said that the company had not given its final decision.

"I am confident that sooner or later it will use Malaysia as a manufacturing base of high technology products. Even now, they are producing flat screen TV and many other sophisticated products in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who also visited the Osaka Electro-Communication University, well known as a multimedia centre, said he hoped the university would cooperate with Universiti Multimedia in Cyberjaya to further enhance the capability of Malaysian students in the field of information technology.

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