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`Master aerospace technologies`

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MALAYSIA'S ability to be self-sufficient and leapfrog towards Vision 2020 could be realised by mastering aerospace technologies, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Besides its ability to meet knowledge and educational needs, he said aerospace activities could also serve as a tool to promote health and save lives.

"Aerospace technologies are not just for reconnaissance purposes but can serve as an engine of economic growth," he said during the first anniversary celebrations of the launch of Malaysia's first microsatellite "TiungSAT-1" at the Mahsuri International and Exhibition Centre during Lima '01.

TiungSAT-1 is a collaborative project between Astronautic Technology (M) Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned Government company and Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd (SSTL) United Kingdom.

In his speech read by Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain, Dr Mahathir said:

"The varied uses of aerospace technologies means Malaysia should not only remain consumers or spectators to the development of this sector.

"The benefits to be derived from this field leaves us with no choice but to fully exploit and incorporate more aerospace equipment and technologies for our own good, while making contributions in science and technology for our future."

The TiungSAT-1 microsatellite programme, he added, served as a springboard for the country to exploit its potential in aerospace.

The TiungSAT-1, Malaysia's first national microsatellite, launched last September in Kazakhstan, was designed and manufactured by engineers from ATSB and SSTL.

The microsatellite programme was initiated by Dr Mahathir with a view that it would serve as an impetus for expanding Malaysia's capability in the high technology industry.

"As we march towards 2020, our preparations to emerge as a developed country must encompass the mastery of critical technologies such as information technology, applied sciences and bio-engineering."

The development of aerospace technology provided numerous spin-offs, he added, including the potential to spawn the development of new products and sub-sectors.

Following the country's success in launching its first microsatellite, Dr Mahathir said ATSB had begun two international joint venture programmes:

* The Medium Sized Aperture Camera (MAC) programme with South Korea's Satellite Technology Research Centre which aims to provide Malaysian engineers and scientists with experience and expertise in the development of advanced optical earth observation system for small satellites; and,

* SPORT (Small payload Orbit Transfer) - a flexible, affordable and highly reliable orbit transfer vehicle suited to deploy a range of spacecraft into a variety of orbits.

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