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PM unveils Malaysia's first reconnaissance aircraft

WHAT started off as a far-fetched idea has become a reality after Malaysia's aerial reconnaissance aircraft - the Eagle ARV (aerial reconnaissance vehicle) - was unveiled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday.

Developed for the Malaysian Armed Forces by Composites Technology Research Malaysia (CTRM) in partnership with BAe Systems and Excelnet Sdn Bhd, the aircraft made its maiden flight from the Langkawi International Airport.

The unpiloted double-seater plane circled the skies for about 10 minutes.

Besides Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, other VVIPs present included the Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, CTRM chief executive officer Tan Sri Dr Chen Lip Keong and BAe group managing director Sir Charles Masefield.

In his speech before unveiling the aircraft, Dr Mahathir said the idea to have a locally manufactured aircraft capable of flying without a pilot seemed far-fetched when it was first mooted by Masefield.

However, the Prime Minister said it was a good idea and persuaded the Government to finance the project's research and development.

"It's a unique aircraft in the sense that it can be flown by a pilot and also be un-manned. In the future we would undoubtedly be seeing more and more unpiloted aircraft," he said.

Jesting, Dr Mahathir said aerial combat would involve pilotless planes.

"This will happen so that they may shoot each other's plane down without killing anyone."

Utilising all composite material, the Eagle ARV is able to fly at a maximum altitude of 8,500 metres for 10 hours.

The plane uses digital flight control, navigation and guidance.

The ARV is controlled in real time up to a distance of 250km while flying on a line-of-sight profile.

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