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THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS, MALAYSIA
Bangunan Ingenieur, Lots 60 & 62, Jalan 52/4, P.O. Box 223,
(Jalan Sultan) 46720 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.
Tel: 03-7968 4001/4002 Fax: 03-7957 7678
E-mail: sec@iem.org.my Homepage: http://www.iem.org.my

Malaysia's Quest in the Aerospace and Aeronautic Industries Arena

By: Ir. Mah Soo, Bulletin Editor

Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are."

Most of us have forgotten how many times we have heard this nursery rhyme without realising that this could have been our first introduction in developing our inquisitiveness towards the mysteries of flight, space and the cosmos.

Since the first successful flight by the Wright brothers on 17 December 1903, air travel has been added as a mode of travel in addition to that by land and by sea. This was extended to outer space travel with the application of Newton's Third Law of Motion by pioneers such as Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Robert Goddard (the father of modern rocket science) and Hermann Oberth and Wernher Von Braun, who convinced the world of the possibility of taking man into space.

Though Malaysia's aerospace and aeronautics is in its infancy stage, we have made a start with the formation of the Aerospace and Aeronautic Industries in Malaysia (AIM) in 1983, Aircraft Inspection, Repair and Overhaul Depot (AIROD) in 1985. In 1997, another impetus was given by our previous Prime Minister, Y.A.B. Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, with the introduction of the Aerospace Industry Development Plan. The first call for selection for our Angkasawan in August 2005 attracted 1,275 applicants; out of which 894 candidates were short-listed and 12 candidates (with a few were engineers) were selected for follow-up training.

Joining in the space quest could open up our networking to benefit from the latest R&D advances in science and technology. When Gregory Olsen, an American scientist, paid US$20 million to visit the international space station on his own personal capacity, there must be much more to it than just publicity. We should approach this quest with caution and not be carried away by the limelight but stay in focus on what we aspire to achieve with such exorbitantly expensive programs.

To be more down to earth, it would be more cost-effective if we concentrate on improving our existing facilities to support the aviation industry. We could upgrade our expertise in AIROD to establish ourselves in the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) capabilities. Also with the recent introduction of the super-sized aircrafts such as the Boeing 777 and the Airbus A-380, evaluation of the adequacy of our KLIA facilities and runway has to be carried out. This is especially so due to the increased dimensions, weight loadings and different landing gear designs. This is to ensure Malaysia is ready to handle these giants when the time comes. ■