

S'pore may be site for 'green' space-plane demo

■ BY GRACE CHUA

AEROSPACE firm European Aeronautic Defence and Space (EADS) is considering a space-plane demonstration in Singapore, its executive adviser said at a climate change conference here yesterday.

The aerospace giant is developing its space plane as a precursor to a zero-emissions aircraft that can travel faster than sound, explained Mr Marvyn Lim.

The company announced at the Berlin Air Show last month that it would be starting a three-year study on the hypersonic plane. It is touted to use zero-emissions hydrogen fuel and can travel much faster than normal planes and at a much higher altitude.

He was speaking at a conference on European Union and Asian policy responses to climate change and energy security. The two-day conference, which continues today, is organised by the Institute

of Southeast Asian Studies, the Energy Studies Institute (ESI), and the EU Centre in Singapore.

The conference comes five months ahead of the United Nations' climate change meeting in Cancun, Mexico, at the end of this year, which aims to hammer out international agreements to cope with climate change.

Mr Lim, a Singaporean, explained why the country was a good pick for a space-plane demonstration: "I believe that Singapore has the entrepreneurship and technology culture to appreciate such an animal."

The aerospace company is also working with Singapore institutions such as the Agency for Science, Technology and Research's Institute of Chemical and Engineering Sciences on projects such as algal biofuels. Other biofuels such as palm oil, however, came under scrutiny at the conference, which featured presentations from academics and industry players across Asia.

Dr Hooman Peimani, ESI's head of energy security and geopolitics, cautioned that biofuel production could hasten environmental destruction if not done sustainably. "The way we produce biofuels today is highly pollutive, resource- and water-intensive, and takes fertiliser," he said, citing palm oil in Indonesia and Malaysia as an example of biofuel production contributing to deforestation.

In Indonesia, for instance, 3.8 million ha of land were used for oil palm between 1996 and last year. That included palm oil for food, fuel and other use.

Biofuels and a diverse range of energy sources, however, are necessary for energy security and to ensure that developing countries have enough energy to grow, Dr Peimani and other speakers said.

Meanwhile, Mr Tan Yong Soon, permanent secretary of the National Climate Change Secretariat, said Singapore would work to secure a global agreement on climate change, and stick to its plans to increase energy efficiency and reduce emissions.

"I believe we can, and must, succeed in balancing our fight against climate change and in ensuring a high standard of living with good jobs for all," he said. "Singapore has always taken a balanced approach to growth and sustainability and we have been reaping the fruits of our on-going efforts as a reference site for other countries and cities."