

Dr Mahathir happy with exhibition preparations

By K. Bala

LANGKAWI, Mon. — With a week before the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace '95 (Lima) exhibition begins, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today made a five-hour visit to gauge the progress and left satisfied with the preparations.

Expressing confidence that all work will be completed before Lima '95 from Dec 5 to 10, the Prime Minister was also happy to note that that participation of firms was twice that for Lima '93, with 588 exhibitors from 35 countries.

"There are more planes with 86 major aircraft and 40 light and microlite planes.

"This time there are also more marine craft including mega yachts and 18 battle-ships," he said, noting that Lima was now ranked fifth in the world after Farnborough (the United Kingdom), Paris (France), Dubai (United Arab Emirates) and Singapore.

Dr Mahathir, who has been the architect behind the success of Lima which has become synonymous with the growth of Langkawi, was speaking to reporters after attending a briefing, at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre — the main venue for the event.

He was briefed by Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Syed Jaafar Albar, ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman Shariff and Datuk Radzi Manan, execu-



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tive chairman of Le Proton, the organisers.

Dr Mahathir said the only fear, if any, was that despite the availability of 7,200 rooms now, these could still not be enough.

He has asked that the management find ways to accommodate all those connected with the event.

On the highlights, he said the aerobatics show had attracted 12 aircraft from the famed British Red Arrows, the Russian Knights (four jets) and the Benson and Hedges light aircraft team (four planes).

Asked on the impact of Lima on the country, he said it had benefited the country, particularly the airlines, aerospace, satellite and tourism industries.

Elaborating, he said since the first Lima, Malaysia had been wanting to buy satellites for broadcasting and communications. One satellite was being launched this year and another next year, he said, adding that these would also be used by neighbouring countries.

Another impact was that local airlines were now

more brave and buying more aircraft. One example, he said was the joint venture between Tan Sri Ting Pek Khiing's Ekran and the Sabah and Sarawak Governments to launch an airline to serve the East Asia Growth Area, comprising Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Brunei.

Asked on military aircraft which appeared to dominate the show, Dr Mahathir said: "There are also many pas-

senger planes, private jets and other aircraft."

He said that since more countries produced military jets, it was natural more of them took part in such shows. Only a few countries in Europe and the US are making passenger planes.

"In any case, there are more military planes in all major air shows."

Responding to a question on whether maritime craft were taking a back seat to

the planes, he said it was easier to bring the aircraft in on cargo planes or fly them in direct.

Moreover, the boat industry in Malaysia was still new, resulting in few local manufacturers taking part. But he was confident that there was good potential for small and pleasure crafts.

Dr Mahathir also confirmed that the Cabinet would be holding its meeting at the newly built Gu-

nung Raya Conference Centre on Dec 6.

Dr Mahathir later visited the Port Langkasuka project where the maritime craft will be displayed for Lima.

He also visited the adjacent RM60 million Aqua-Beat — the nation's first indoor water theme park which was completed by Ekran on reclaimed land in seven months. He will open it on Dec 6.