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Air Rally put off indefinitely because of worsening haze

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IPOH, Sat. - The third stage of the inaugural Great Malaysian Air Rally 1997 has been put off indefinitely following a worsening of the haze.

The rally was flagged off by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Royal Malaysian Air Force air station in Sungai Besi on Monday.

According to a spokesman for the Department of Civil Aviation, the 20 light aircraft, which were flagged off this morning by Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib at the Sultan Azlan Shah airport, could not take off as scheduled because visibility was poor.

Asked when the planes would be able to take off, he said that would depend on the condition of the haze tomorrow.

The organiser for the event, Le Proton LIMA Sdn Bhd, had earlier postponed the take off because of the haze.

Its executive chairman Datuk Mohd Radzi Manan said until the visibility improved, there was no way the planes could take off as the haze was up to about 2,000 metres from the ground here and in Alor Setar it was about 1,000 metres.

Mohd Radzi also said because of the haze, the DCA had recommended that only 30 aircraft could take off at one time. A fleet of 20 light airplanes, including a glider, were supposed to fly off to Alor Setar in Kedah at 10am today.

Instead the small group of spectators at the airport were treated to an aerial display by some of the airplanes. The air rally began from Sungai Besi in Kuala Lumpur last Monday. From Sungai Besi the airplanes took off to Malacca and then to Terengganu and here. The airplanes from Terengganu will attempt to reach Alor Star tomorrow.

The final lap will be from Alor Star to Langkawi on Monday where the airplanes will be welcomed by Dr Mahathir.

The air rally is a prelude to the Langkawi Fly-In 1997, dubbed as Asia's first flying convention and exhibition involving manufacturers and pilots of light and ultra-light aircraft from Aug 4 to 8.

The participants are aircraft manufacturers from South Africa, Italy, Germany, Singapore, Thailand and Australia.

Concerned with the worsening haze condition, Ramli urged the public to inform the Department of Environment if there were any incidence of open burning in their localities.

Meanwhile, an in-coming Pelangi Air flight to Medan from Kuala Lumpur via Ipoh which was supposed to arrive at 2.45pm was delayed to 5.20pm.

A spokesman from Pelangi Air said the delay was due to poor visibility. The flight to Medan, supposed to take off at 3pm, was rescheduled for 5.40pm.

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