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All geared up for a successful Lima '97 (HL)

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LANGKAWI, Sun. - With two weeks to go before the fourth Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition opens, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed satisfaction with all aspects of the preparations, particularly the good response from exhibitors.

The Prime Minister said he was happy to note that this year's show would be the biggest thus far with 903 aerospace and maritime exhibitors.

He said not only would the maritime aspect of the exhibition get more focus with the separation of the exhibits but also the aerospace display would be held in a newly expanded Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre.

At the inaugural Lima, only 98 participants from 14 countries displayed their products and services and in a tented area which only occupied 2,500sq metres.

This had increased to 375 exhibitors from 30 countries in 1993 who occupied 6,700sq metres of space in the newly-built MIEC and the Kuah jetty.

There were 642 exhibitors from 35 countries at Lima '95 who occupied 10,000sq metres at the MIEC and Port Langkasuka.

This time around exhibitors have occupied 23,520sq metres in the expanded MIEC and the new maritime venue at Tanjung Malai.

Dr Mahathir was speaking after briefings by Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar and the ministry's secretary-general Datuk Azizan Hussin on the preparations for the event.

He was also briefed by Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd executive chairman Datuk Radzi Manan on the aerospace section and Huswah Exhibition Sdn Bhd executive chairman Laksamana Madya (Rtd) Tan Sri Abdul Wahab Nawi on the maritime section.

In previous exhibitions, Le Proton Lima handled the aerospace and maritime exhibits. Dividing the workload for this year's show between Le Proton and Huswah has already borne fruit with better focus and attention to detail.

Dr Mahathir was also happy with the sailing event, the "Malaysia Challenge", which was being organised for the first time as one of the highlights of the maritime exhibition.

On the spin-off effects of Lima, Dr Mahathir said it had popularised Langkawi as an international resort besides creating more interest in the aviation and maritime industry.

"It is a trade show and not a public entertainment event," he said, citing the rationale for opening the exhibition to the public only on the last two days.

He added that trade visitors were decision makers who had the power to make deals.

He said the growing response to Lima was because sales clinched by exhibitors had increased.

He attributed the increased sales to the setting up of new airlines in the country and also the purchase of private jets by Malaysian businessmen.

Similarly, the increased participation in the maritime section is because the exhibitors are confident of gains.

When asked to comment on the record response, despite the regional currency problems, he replied the investors-exhibitors took a long-term view.

"Many view this (currency problem) as temporary. They are participating not just for immediate benefit but they are looking at long-term gains," he said.

Earlier, at the briefing, in an overview of the preparations and response, Azizan said four submarines from Russia, France, Turkey and Pakistan would be participating in the maritime exhibition for the first time this year.

He said so far the Sultan of Brunei and government leaders, mostly Defence Ministers, from 52 countries had accepted invitations.

In his briefing, Radzi said as in the previous Lima, the famed Red Arrows from Britain would be showing their aerobatic prowess.

The aerial display will be held from 1.30pm to 4.30pm daily except on Friday when it will be held from 2pm.

Radzi said he was also waiting confirmation from aerobatic teams from Russia and South Africa.

This time, areas would also be set aside for helicopters and light aircraft.

Aerospace and maritime conferences would also be held during the exhibition.

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