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All systems go for world's biggest aerospace, maritime show

ALL final preparations for the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace show, the world's biggest aerospace and maritime show, is progressing on schedule, just hours before its official opening by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tomorrow.

"All is under control and it is well-managed," Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar told reporters, after a full dress rehearsal of the joint-opening of the aerospace and maritime shows of Lima '97 at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre yesterday.

Syed Hamid, who spent about three hours at the centre, said it was expected of shows like Lima to witness last-minute preparations.

"Based on my past experience with Lima, since its first show in 1991, there is nothing to worry about the current pace of preparations," he said.

Up to this afternoon, only half of the 620 exhibitors had turned up.

Many more streamed in last evening, especially those from neighbouring countries.

Syed Hamid who arrived here early Saturday morning to ensure there were no major glitches in the run-up to the opening of Lima '97, also said many foreign exhibitors he had met had expressed their support for the show.

"Although recent developments concerning the Malaysian economy could have driven some exhibitors away, they, however, did not take such an approach.

"These exhibitors told me that they were not here for short-term gains, rather they know of the country's long term potential."

In this sense, he noted that Lima had matured.

Lima, like other established air shows in the world including the Le Bourget air show in Paris, France, was here to stay,

The show, which was an idea mooted by Dr Mahathir, had attracted many big names in the maritime and aerospace industries.

The beneficiaries have not always been the foreign exhibitors, who have ended with multimillion ringgit orders for their defence equipment like Boeing Commercial Airplane Company.

"In fact, we have today 150 Malaysian companies among the exhibitors, the biggest number of local firms to participate at Lima, since the show started," said Syed Hamid.

With the presence of top names in the maritime and aerospace industries, he expected local firms to take the opportunity to enter into strategic alliances or smart partnerships.

In line with the Government's move to look into a national policy on aerospace development, he anticipated greater interest among foreigners to tie up with local firms.

"We expect the aerospace industry to be the catalyst for growth in the next century," said Syed Hamid, adding that this augurs well for companies, local and foreign wishing to invest in the aerospace industry."

Meanwhile, Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd executive chairman Datuk Radzi Manan said more than 300 exhibitors had arrived at the MIEC.

Of the 74 aircraft participating in the static and aerial display, he said, 24 had arrived including attack helicopters, the Royal Air Force aerobatic team, the Red Arrows, and the United States Pacific Air Force F-16C Falcons.

He also said the Russians, who had earlier indicated that they might not

be sending their aerobatic teams, had changed their mind somewhat.

"We now understand that a SU-27 Flanker fighter bomber and a SU-30 multi-role fighter jet will be here for the show," he said.

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