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Downpour augurs well for opening of event by Dr M

LANGKAWI, Sun. - A heavy downpour over the legendary island today was welcomed by the Langkawi Oshkosh East Fly-In convention and exhibition organisers and exhibitors.

With forward visibility at less than 150 metres and ground visibility at below 300 metres for incoming aeroplanes, the haze hanging over Langkawi had threatened to cancel the fly-in of 19 light airplanes from Alor Star for tomorrow's opening by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Event organiser Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd executive chairman Datuk Mohd Radzi Manan, when met earlier, had hoped for heavy rain to clear the haze hanging over most parts of the island.

"Believe it or not," he said, "I am hoping for heavy rain to clear the haze by tomorrow. Otherwise, it is going to spoil the whole event.

"We cannot even hold the air display, let alone the parachuting competition," he said.

The event, said to be Asia's first, is aimed at promoting the culture of sports flying and aviation among youth.

It is modelled after a similar show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in the United States, where thousands of aviation hobbyists and enthusiasts make their annual pilgrimage.

At the show site earlier today, workers were busy putting the finishing touches to the area, located adjacent to the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre (MIEC).

A team of technicians from Tenaga Nasional Berhad was also trying to supply power to the exhibition area. Exhibitors were getting their flying machines ready for display.

Among the aeroplanes already at the exhibition centre are two gliders and several ultralights as well as Malaysia's very own Eagle 150 light aeroplane.

Tomorrow, the 19 light aircraft, micro and ultralights are expected to arrive at the Langkawi International Airport at Padang Mat Sirat for the opening ceremony.

The Department of Civil Aviation has closed the airspace between 9.15am and 11.30am and from 5pm to 7pm for the air displays.

But those hoping to see jet fighters like those displayed at the biennial Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA) will be disappointed.

"This is strictly for light and recreational aircraft," said Radzi. "No jet planes except perhaps for the remote control section where a top Japanese modeller is expected to bring his jet remote control aircraft".

Apart from the aircraft display, a host of other events has been lined up, including parachuting competition and remote control flying.

There will also be daily talks by speakers from various organisations on different aspects of aviation.

Le Proton has arranged for schoolchildren to be brought in for the event to get them acquainted with aviation.

"Our vision is to nurture the aviation culture," he said, "with the hope of making Malaysia the centre for sports aviation in Asia as envisioned by the Prime Minister".

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