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Lima '97

LIMA '97 SET TO BE YET ANOTHER SUCCESS STORY

By: E.Sivabalan

LANGKAWI, Nov 27 (Bernama) -- The roaring sound of fighter jets will reverberate once again in Langkawi as Southeast Asia gears up for its biggest air and maritime show yet -- the Langkawi International and Maritime Aerospace Exhibition (Lima) '97 -- next week.

As the raging fireballs fill the blue sky, battle ships and, for the first time, submarines will cruise their way through the clear waters of this scenic tourist resort, setting the stage for the largest "commercial war" to sell civilian and military hardware.

The Dec 2-7 Lima '97, according to Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, will offer a premium showcase of the latest technologies.

"Lima offers that kind of opportunity to see hands-on what's new in the market," he said.

Syed Hamid, who is also Lima '97 Main Coordinating Committee chairman, said that since the first show in 1991, Lima, a biennial event mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has "come a long way next to the Paris, Farnborough and Dubai airshows."

"Now we are in the diary of exhibition of that class. It (Lima) is not something of inferior class. It has grown by leaps and bounds," the minister noted.

Syed Hamid said this year's Lima would have the biggest number of participants with 903 companies from over 40 countries.

Of the 903 companies, 150 are Malaysian-owned, which he said was a "very good figure" compared with previous shows which were dominated by foreign firms.

At stake at Lima '97, to be opened by Dr Mahathir, will be business opportunities worth billions of ringgit as companies from rich and developing countries try to outwit each other to sell their merchandise to their mainly Asian customers.

According to Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd, the organiser of Lima's aerospace exhibition, 620 companies from 41 countries had confirmed their participation in the aerospace exhibition.

Among the renowned companies are Australian Defence Industries Ltd (Australia), British Aerospace (U.K.), Bombardier Aerospace Group (Canada), Airbus Industrie, Arianespace, Aerospatiale (France), McDonnell Douglas and Lockheed Martin (United States) and MAPO (Russia).

Despite the currency and stock market turmoil, Lima '97, is expected to be a "success", according to military analysts.

Although Syed Hamid said the government was "a bit worried and concerned" about the effects of currency and stock market crisis on Lima, "fortunately it has not done any harm to us."

"People see us with confidence... We are not looking to market (the products at Lima) today, we are looking at two or three years down the road," he said.

Already 16 aircraft purchase agreements estimated to run into billions of ringgit will be signed during the show.

And for the thousands of aircraft enthusiasts who will throng the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre at Padang Matsirat, they can expect to get a glimpse of the latest state-of-the-art attack helicopters ranging from Uncle Sam's AH-64 Apache Helicopter to South Africa's Rooivalk.

The choppers will be joined by the various type of fighter planes in conducting aerial and static display.

The US will showcase its already proven F-16 Fighting Falcon which will perform a daily airshow, a KC-135 air-refuelling tanker plane and two SH-60B Seahawk helicopters.

All in, 85 aircraft, 50 ships and four submarines are expected to participate in this year's show.

The focus in the maritime sector will be the four submarines -- one each from France, Turkey, Russia and Pakistan -- which will be making their first appearance at Lima.

France and Pakistan will show off their Agosta class, Turkey, the 209/1400 class and Russia, the Kilo class.

And as in past shows, Lima '97 will gather together highly qualified senior government officials, military top brass, corporate leaders and industry professionals who will find a wealth of information on the latest technologies and innovations in the fields of aerospace, maritime and defence industries.

Lima in Syed Hamid's own words, has now earned the title of a world-class event and is recognised internationally.

The show, which covers both civilian and military products has become a major international event since its inception in 1991. The aerospace side of the show is organised by Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd while the maritime event is organised by Huswah Exhibition Sdn Bhd.

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