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LIMA-Mahathir (Bernama-Ex)

LIMA '97 YET ANOTHER "SELL-OUT"

By: E. Sivabalan

LANGKAWI, Dec 7 (Bernama) -- International aerospace and maritime players had a field day at the world-class Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) '97 Exhibition seeing an average of 10 pacts sealed a day since the start of the show last Tuesday.

As LIMA '97 drew to a close today, the organisers were kept on the run to arrange for more impromptu agreement signing between companies that did not want to leave this resort island empty-handed.

As usual, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has been the key player and sometimes the "umpire" too for company executives piecing together agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), is upbeat about the harvest at this showcase of ships and planes despite the region's economic gloom.

"This thing doesn't happen overnight," he told Bernama in an interview, referring to the flurry of activities here over the past week which seemed to have been turned into a "battlefield" not of soldiers but of men in black business suits.

But Dr Mahathir said whatever had been signed would "take a long time before things are actually consummated."

"So, even if they sign today, it doesn't mean that they are immediately going to spend the money," he said.

The Prime Minister, who also launched the National Aerospace Blueprint on Friday, said on the other hand, the signing for joint ventures was, "of course, very good."

Some the deals sealed would provide for local production or repair of military hardwares like aircraft and naval vessels by Malaysian companies with the help of their foreign partners who will be transferring their technologies.

"A lot of things are going to be done here and a lot of things will be exported from here," the Prime Minister said.

This time around Malaysia Airlines (MAS) set the pace for the deal signings by announcing that it was buying a Boeing Business jet.

Apart from the MAS deal, two MoUs and a sales marketing agreement were signed on the Lima '97 opening itself, involving local and foreign companies for the sale of light aircraft, the servicing of helicopter blades locally and regionally and the development and implementation of an integrated software for the management of capital intensive industries.

One of the more significant deals was between Khazanah Nasional Berhad, the Malaysian government's investment arm, and British Aerospace to develop Malaysia's capability in design and manufacture of aerospace products.

The agreement allows Malaysia access to aerospace technologies and to create the technical skills and intellectual property for the country to compete for international aerospace work and future aircraft programmes.

Documents were also exchanged in the maritime sector with seven MoUs signed on Thursday alone, a record of sorts.

One was between the German Naval Group and Naval Dockyard Sdn Bhd, a company under the Penang Shipbuilding and Construction Group for a joint venture to manufacture new generation offshore patrol vessels.

Another was between Naval Dockyard and Royal Ordnance, a wholly owned subsidiary of British Aerospace Plc for the promotion, manufacture and supply of the 105mm artillery gun called Sakti.

LIMA '97 has been a silver lining amidst the currency and stock market

doldrums, and as Dr Mahathir put it, the stage is set for Malaysia to be a major player on the international aerospace and maritime scene. -- BERNAMA  
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