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Maritime segment of Lima shows it can draw crowds too

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THIS year's Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima '97), like previous shows in the biennial series, saw an improvement in terms of the number of participants and displays, especially in the maritime segment.

Lima, which made its debut in 1991, has been drawing more and more participants, particularly foreign aviation and maritime companies, which wanted to showcase their products to the Malaysian market, as well as the South-East Asian region and worldwide in general.

Lima '97 saw a total of 784 companies participating in the show, with 650 displaying aircraft and products at the aerospace exhibition, with the remaining 134 at the maritime show. In comparison, Lima '95 drew 642 participating companies.

For some Malaysian companies, especially the new players in the aviation industry such as SME Aviation Sdn Bhd and Composites Technology Research Malaysia (CTRM), Lima '97 was a platform for them to introduce locally-made aircraft to potential buyers.

Indeed, some have been successful, such as CTRM, which managed to clinch several deals during the show, including sales of its Eagle 150B and LancAir aircraft. CTRM signed five deals during the six-day Lima '97.

The Government's move to leave the handling of the maritime and the aerospace segments of Lima '97 to two companies - Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd (the original organiser) and Huswah Exhibition Sdn Bhd (newcomer to Lima) - seems to have borne fruit, especially in promoting the maritime show which has been receiving lukewarm response in the past three Lima shows.

For this year, the maritime segment registered a total of 134 participants. More important is that the organiser, Huswah Exhibition, managed to add some excitement to the show through the sailing competition and to display vessels that had not been seen in Malaysian waters before. These vessels include the four submarines brought in from Russia, France, Pakistan and Turkey.

With cooperation from Star Cruises, Huswah Exhibition more or less made the maritime segment more lively than the previous Lima shows. It also helped that the newly completed Star Cruises terminal in Tanjung Malai was the venue for the maritime segment this year, thus attracting more visitors to the show.

The presence of several Star Cruises liners, such as Star Pisces, Star Aquarius and MegaStar Taurus, and the launching of SuperStar Express during the show boosted the maritime exhibition.

But the highlights of the maritime segment surely goes to the four submarines which had not been seen in Malaysian waters before, although some may claim that they have seen submarines plying along the Straits of Malacca or the South China Sea.

In line with the Government's efforts to reduce Malaysia's current account deficit, the maritime segment of Lima '97 has served as a platform to develop the country's shipping and maritime industries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who officiated both the aerospace and maritime segments of Lima '97, has stressed the importance for Malaysians to venture into the shipping and maritime industries to help reduce the current account deficit.

He said although Malaysia has all the makings of a maritime nation, strategically located at the centre of shipping lanes and a large sea area

rich in fishery, oil and gas resources, it has yet to optimise all these attributes to qualify as such.

Efforts to transform Malaysia into a true maritime nation began in earnest only about two decades ago although, as Dr Mahathir has said, Malaysians, especially the Malays, were once renowned seafarers, as portrayed by men like Panglima Awang or Henry the Black who along with Magellan circumnavigated the globe.

Unfortunately, Malaysians have somehow lost this trait, he said, adding that the long years under colonial rule have perhaps made Malaysians landlubbers with a distinct dislike for being away from home for any length of time.

Explaining the importance of the maritime industry, Dr Mahathir said the country's Second Outline Perspective Plan clearly describes the potential role of the maritime sector to the long-term growth and development of the country, especially in creating new and non-traditional marine based and related economic activities until the year 2000 and beyond.

On the aerospace front, the show registered a total number of 650 participants from 40 countries and 96 aircraft for the static and aerial displays. However, some visitors felt that the show was not as interesting as before. This was probably because the aerospace segment had been in the limelight all this while, in contrast to the maritime portion.

The air show, they (the public) claimed, lacked "star attractions", such as the US-made Stealth bomber. This could be be part of the reasons, besides the absence of the Russian aerobatic team - the Russian Black Knights - with their Sukhoi-27s.

However, the organiser and those responsible in ensuring security and safety of visitors should be lauded for ensuring a smooth and organised show.

For example, to prevent people from milling around the aircraft displayed on the tarmac of the aerospace site, the relevant authorities put barriers in an orderly manner so that visitors could view them at the proper place.

They (visitors) were not allowed near the aircraft as in previous shows, but had to remain at designated places to view the planes. Hopefully, this will not deter the public from coming to the next Lima exhibition in 1999, which is expected to be bigger than Lima '97.

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