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PM: Bright future for aerospace industry in Southeast Asia

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LANGKAWI, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad painted a bright picture of the future of the aerospace industry in Southeast Asia where the fall in the value of currencies has made the region more attractive for the production of high-quality components at lower costs.

The Prime Minister said this would be particularly so in the production of labour-intensive composite items.

Dr Mahathir said this at the opening of the fourth Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition.

He said the bright prospect was based on the fact that some countries in the Asia-Pacific region were actively negotiating joint ventures to produce jets and other commercial aircraft.

"Without doubt the aerospace industry in this part of the world will be growing at the same accelerated rate as was the economy prior to July 1997.

"The anticipated demand for aircraft by countries in the Asia Pacific is estimated at one quarter of the 15,000 aircraft requirement of the world, valued at US\$400 billion (RM1.4 trillion), by 2014.

"Needless to say, this creates tremendous opportunities for the major aircraft manufacturers. It is, therefore, not surprising that of late aircraft manufacturers have been concentrating their marketing efforts in this part of the world."

The Prime Minister reiterated his past statements that Lima was not a defence exhibition, but pointed out that aerospace and maritime industries could not be separated from air and naval defence.

"At this exhibition, there will be military aircraft as well as naval ships. There is no arms race in this region but the fact remains that old equipment needs to be replaced with more modern ones and capacity enhanced as areas of defence responsibility widens.

"There will therefore be a great deal of interest on the part of Governments in the region for replacements for their outdated fleets and aerial defence equipment."

This year's Lima has been given a boost by the creation of a maritime division which handles a much bigger display of maritime products and services at Tanjung Malai. This has given Lima a much-needed focus in organisational matters.

Dr Mahathir will be here until Lima ends on Sunday. During his stay, he will also chair the weekly Cabinet meeting at Gunung Raya.

The Prime Minister said the Defence Ministers and military personnel from countries in the region who are here would also be interested in acquiring manufacturing capability for themselves.

"I am sure all exhibitors know this but those with the most innovative ideas and willingness to transfer technology will find a lot of advantages ... exhibiting is costly but the defence business is a costly business for Governments.

"They will want to get the best bargains. They cannot be travelling all over the world to inspect the goods, even if these trips are expense paid. Lima provides a good overall view of the equipment they will be interested in."

Dr Mahathir also paid tribute to the airshow which entertains the public. "You never know if a curious young visitor may turn out to be a top executive in a company or Government.

"He may be choosing the aircraft or the ship or the cruise boat for the Government or the company. He may even be an exhibitor at this airshow in the future."

The Prime Minister made special mention of the British Aerospace and the RAF for their generosity in bringing the Red Arrows aerobatic team to Lima.

"As is well known, several air forces in the region operate the Hawk aircraft used by the British Red Arrows team.

"We hope other manufacturers and air forces will bring their aerobatic teams in the future.

"We have the airspace and the time for their aerial displays as few other airshows have."

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