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Exhibition with upbeat outlook launched

IN his first public function since leading the Barisan Nasional to victory in the general election, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched Lima '99 with an upbeat outlook on the local aerospace and maritime industry.

The Prime Minister was pleased to note that the local aerospace industry had begun negotiating with leading aerospace companies worldwide to form strategic alliances in manufacturing aircraft parts and components under licence and sub-contract.

Noting that the achievement was timely, Dr Mahathir said he was told that there would be a number of contracts, purchase orders and memoranda of understanding to be signed during Lima for the two industries between local and foreign companies. He is expected to witness the contract signing between SME Aerospace and British Aerospace and between SME Aerospace and Alenia Aerospazio of Italy.

"I am also told that Malaysian aerospace companies are venturing into other hi-tech areas like systems integration and simulator development," he said when opening the biennial exhibition at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Lima '99 organising committee chairman Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Abang Mustapha and Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid.

Dr Mahathir said a growth area in the maritime industry was the development of the leisure craft industry, particularly with how Malaysians have become affluent and developed a taste for the "yachting lifestyle".

He pointed this trend to the increasing number of marinas and seaside resorts being built and the development of lake resorts to complement the new lifestyle. Dr Mahathir said another pertinent growth area was the number and capacity of the local shipbuilding and repair yards which have increased many fold over the years.

The acquisition of frigates and launching of the Royal Malaysian Navy's patrol vessels project undertaken by NSD-Naval Dockyard together with the German Naval Group were Government efforts to further stimulate the industries.

"This is also to enhance indigenous technical know-how," he said, "through various means of transfer of foreign technology".

With Malaysian companies now being able to build high-speed ferry boats for export worldwide, Dr Mahathir said the maritime industry should embark on a more aggressive role in such technologically high-end activities as warship design and development.

This would eventually stimulate, he said, the development of local capabilities in naval architecture, marine engineering, marine communication and others.

In line with the Multimedia Super Corridor, Dr Mahathir said the maritime industry should also aggressively embark on Smart Partnerships towards incorporating more IT based technology and automation in maritime activities.

"I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in the global market place only the strong survive," he said. "To succeed, we need to find our own niches. We need to build upon our strengths and focus on our competitiveness. "In cases where competition is overwhelming, we should think of strategic partnerships or even mergers in order to be more

competitive," he added.

After visiting the exhibition booths, Dr Mahathir and exhibitors were treated to an aerial display of jet fighters, particularly the MIG-29s piloted by RMAF pilots and the RAF's Red Arrows.

He then visited the maritime exhibition at Tanjung Malai.

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