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Final preparations to make show the best

LANGKAWI, Sun. - As the big day approaches, sailors from the Royal Malaysian Navy, contractors and exhibitors are working around the clock at Tanjung Malai to make the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition '99 the best show ever to be staged in the 20th century.

Most of the makeshift exhibition booths have been occupied by local and international exhibitors who came in by stages since last week.

The Italians were the first foreign participants to set up their pavilion at the Lima '99 Maritime exhibition hall.

Shipbuilder Ficanteri, which supplied the RMN with the Laksamana-class corvettes, and communications company Alenia Difensia were among the first international defence contractors to arrive.

According to the RMN Maritime Operation Centre at Tanjung Malai, all participating RMN vessels and 12 other international warships are expected to arrive by tomorrow except French vessel FNS Siroco, which is due a day later.

RMN Fleet Operations Command Headquarters public relations officer Lieutenant Commander Carmen R. Edmonds said the spotlight on this year's maritime exhibition would be on four of the navy's latest vessels.

"Visitors will get a chance to look up close at KD Perantau, our most sophisticated hydrographic research vessel which is built here by the Hong Leong-Lurssen shipyard," she said.

KD Lekiu, Malaysia's latest and most high-tech frigate built in the United Kingdom, will also be displayed alongside KD Laksamana Muhammad Amin and KD Tan Puspa, which were built in Italy.

All three vessels feature a lethal combination of firepower and the most sophisticated integrated electronic warfare systems.

Tomorrow, the RMN sailors would have a hectic day at guiding the visiting foreign warships which will anchor around Tanjung Malai for a fleet review by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Dec 1.

"The visiting naval flotilla is heading towards Langkawi on full-steam. We expect more than 4,000 sailors to arrive here beginning tomorrow," said Edmonds.

Meanwhile, at the Langkawi International Airport, activities today are livened up with visiting jet fighters soaring over the skies of Padang Matsirat.

Thirteen aircraft from the US Pacific Force, Royal Malaysian Air Force and Russia arrived on the island yesterday.

More exhibitors and aircraft are expected to arrive tomorrow.

The Lima '99 show opens on Tuesday and will be officially opened by Dr Mahathir on Dec 1.

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