

RMAF pilots give Lima 2001 a roaring start

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LANGKAWI: The slightly overcast skies offered the perfect opportunity for Royal Malaysian Air Force fighter pilots to steal the thunder during the opening ceremony of Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition 2001 yesterday.

The 30-minute opening aerial show got off to a roaring start at 10.45am with an awesome aerobatic display by six MiG-29 Fulcrum fighter jets from the 19th Squadron based in Kuantan.

Led by the squadron's commanding officer Lt Kol (U) Kamalrulzaman Mohd Othman, the pilots who took off from the Butterworth RMAF airbase, showed off various tactical manoeuvres, formations and daring stunts for about 15 minutes.

Later, six screaming F/A-18D Hornets from the 18th Squadron in Butterworth took over from the MiGs for another 15 minutes.

Among the hundreds who watched the show were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Cabinet ministers and other dignitaries.

The highlight of the airshow was an air-to-air refuelling demonstration by two Hornets and a KC-130M tanker, a feat performed by the RMAF for the very first time at Lima.

The RMAF was given barely a week's notice to take on the responsibility of putting on aerial acrobatic shows for Lima 2001 from yesterday to Sunday, following the pullouts by the US Air Force's Thunderbirds and British Royal Air Force's Red Arrows.

The RMAF was initially asked to do only the opening and closing act, but ended up having to perform for 15 minutes daily during Lima.

Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd chairman Datuk Mohd Radzi Manan said even though the RMAF was informed at the 11th hour to participate in the airshow, the pilots' performance was exceptional.

"They are not professional aerobatic airmen, but their aerial display showed that the RMAF has world-class pilots," he said.

Yesterday's show also included a two-minute parachute demonstration by members of the 10th Para Brigade in two Hercules C-130 aircraft.