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As glamorous as before

halim Abas; Sharanjit Singh; Marina Emmanuel

THE United States-led attack on Afghanistan on Sunday and the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington might have left people wondering whether the sixth Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima '01) will be as glamorous and successful as the previous five exhibitions.

But not the organisers.

Despite the last-minute withdrawals of showstealers like the Red Arrows and Thunderbirds aerobatic teams, and the United States' USS Paul Jones, Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd, the organiser of the aerospace exhibition, and HW Lima Sdn Bhd, the organiser of the maritime exhibition, said it will not be "a scaled-down or less exciting show".

On the contrary, Le Proton Lima is confident that the show will go on successfully and Lima '01 would set the benchmark for future shows.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will open Lima '01 at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre in Langkawi today and grace the maritime exhibition later in the afternoon at the Awana Porto Malai Langkawi and Star Cruises Jetty.

Le Proton executive chairman Datuk Radzi Manan said the run-up to this year's exhibition has been impressive and better than the previous Lima in 1999.

He said 95 per cent of the exhibition space had been taken up by 300 exhibitors.

They include exhibitors from India, Russia, the US, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, South Africa, France, Ukraine, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany.

Major companies taking part include India Defence Industries, European Aeronautic Defence & Space Co (Germany), Asian Composite Manufacturing Sdn Bhd (Malaysia), Malaysia Airlines (Malaysia), Gromov, JSC Irkutsk Aviation Industrial Association, Russian Aircraft Corporation "MiG" (all from Russia), BAe Systems (UK) and Boeing (US).

The daily aerial shows at Lima '01 will be staged by the Royal Malaysian Air Force F/A 18 Hornets and MiG 29 Fulcrum jets.

Visitors would also be treated to the breathtaking ability of the Russian-made SU-30MK of the Sukhoi Design Bureau.

Its pilot will not only show off the unbelievable manoeuvrability of the aircraft, but also demonstrate its in-flight refuelling capability.

"It'll be an exciting show as all these aircraft and the daily aerial displays will fill the vacuum left by the Thunderbirds and Red Arrows," Radzi said.

Also, 270 exhibitors and 35 ships, including Royal Malaysian Navy warships, will take part in the six-day maritime show.

HW Lima executive chairman Vice Admiral (Rtd) Tan Sri Abdul Wahab Nawi said this was an improvement over previous years. A total of 238 companies took part in 1997 and 285 in 1999.

The decision to hold Lima '01 before the Dubai 2001 International Aerospace Exhibition in November, and the Naval and Defence 2001 exhibition in Pusan on Oct 30 had raised eyebrows.

Observers believe that aircraft manufacturers, equipment makers and aerospace experts will be strongly present at the exhibition in South Korea in an effort to capture the Chinese market in view of the anticipated modernisation of the Chinese armed forces.

Hence the decision to hold Lima '01 now had been questioned.

Radzi said there was little the organisers' could do but schedule this year's edition this month, as December, being a fasting month, would be unsuitable.

On withdrawals, Radzi said, "Only three or four companies were forced to do so at the last minute, and this has not affected the show much."

He said that Lima is a trade show and success should be measured in terms of the exhibitors' ability to strike business deals.

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