

10/10/2001

Thunderous start to air show

THE Red Arrows and Thunderbirds may not be around, but it certainly did not take away the thunder from the opening day of Lima '01 yesterday.

The VIP crowd and trade visitors present were treated to a breathtaking display of airmanship by Royal Malaysian Air Force pilots who performed aerobatics in F/A 18D Hornets and MiG-29 Fulcrum jets.

The Butterworth and Kuantan-based pilots had been informed at the last minute that they would be taking over the main show of daily aerial displays at Lima '01.

The RMAF was initially asked to perform the opening and closing acts, but will now do a 15-minute display of the total three-hour daily aerial demonstrations by participating aircraft companies.

The team will lead the aerobatics segment of the show, following the withdrawal of the Royal Air Force's Red Arrows and the Thunderbirds team from the United States Air Force.

Their withdrawal came following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in the US and subsequent retaliations by the Allied Forces in Afghanistan.

However, this did not cause a damper on the opening day of Lima '01 once the RMAF jets roared past the tarmac and VIP stand at the Langkawi International Airport.

Among the VIPs present were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd (organiser of the show) executive chairman Datuk Radzi Manan, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain and several Cabinet ministers.

Against a backdrop of blue-grey skies and balmy breeze, the show started with six RMAF MiG-29 from the 19th Squadron performing a fly past at the runway tarmac.

Led by the squadron's commanding officer, Lt Kol Kamalrulzaman Mohd Othman, the fighter pilots displayed various stunts for 12 minutes.

This was followed by a two-minute parachute demonstration by the RMAF para-brigade on board two C-130 aircraft, which took off from Alor Star, after which six F-18 Hornets from the 18th Squadron based in Butterworth took to the skies for another 12-minute display.

Two Hornets and AKC 130M tanker ended the opening show by demonstrating an air-to-air refuelling, a first by the RMAF at Lima.

Dr Mahathir later visited the display booths in the exhibition hall where he was briefed on the products displayed by various exhibitors.

After visiting the exhibition booths, he spent the afternoon at the maritime display at the Awana Porto Malai.

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