

# Govt committed to keep Lima going

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**LANGKAWI:** Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Prime Minister-designate Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi both agree that the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (Lima) exhibition, which has become a major biennial event in this holiday island since it started in 1991, will continue to gain world interest.

Dr Mahathir said Lima had, and would continue to, benefit Malaysia and the Asia Pacific region, which is arguably the second largest market in the world for aerospace and maritime products.

"According to forecasts, the total market for defence exports to Asia alone is predicted to rise to US\$70bil (RM216bil) between 2002 and 2006.

"It is for this reason that the Malaysian Government is supporting the hosting of exhibitions," the Prime Minister said when opening the Lima 2003 show here yesterday.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who addressed the crowd earlier, said Abdullah had also conveyed his personal assurance that the Government, which the Deputy Prime Minister will head from November, is committed towards continuing the Lima exhibition.

Dr Mahathir said Lima had come a long way since its humble start in 1991.



"Today, increasing numbers of exhibitors are drawn to Lima, offering state-of-the-art aerospace and maritime products for the rich and growing market in Southeast Asia and East Asia," he said.

The Prime Minister said a wave of uncertainty swept across the world after Lima 2001, brought about by increasing threats of terrorism and military action.

"Both had destabilising effects on all countries. They slowed down the economy of the world, in particular the air travel and tourist industries.

"As a result, the demand for aircraft, especially commercial aircraft, had diminished. The SARS episode had also affected the travel industry seriously," he said.

He said there were now signs that the East Asia travel trade was making rapid recovery with tourist arrivals in Southeast Asia returning to pre-SARS and pre-Sept 11 levels.

He said this would lead to increased demand for commercial passenger aircraft in Asia.

Dr Mahathir said there was now tremendous growth in the no-frills low-cost airline business, which had enabled those who could not afford to fly before to do so now.

"Orders for new aircraft by low-cost airlines have outstripped those by the normal-cost airlines," he added, saying that Malaysia had its own low-cost airline (AirAsia), which appeared to be doing very well. Najib, in his speech, told Dr Mahathir: "I have spoken to your successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah, and he has given his assurance that the Government will be committed towards Lima in the future."

He said exhibitors at Lima could take heart with the fact that both the aerospace and maritime segments had been accorded priority status as strategic sectors that the Government wished to develop.

"Today, Lima has emerged as one of the foremost defence trade shows in the international calendar," Najib said in paying tribute to Dr Mahathir, who is attending the last Lima as prime minister, before retiring at the end of this month.

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