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A fitting farewell gift for Dr Mahathir as we soar into space

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak

LIMA `03, which ends today, has been an unqualified success by any reckoning. The performance of Lima, from its humble inception to the sophisticated show this year, can comfortably live up to the saying of the ancient Chinese strategist, Sun Tzu.

"Come like the wind, go like lightning", Sun Tzu had said in his book The Art of War.

We hope the progress made by the maritime and aerospace industries, too, can also be characterised by that saying. This will be the best farewell gift to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is scheduled to step down later this month. Yes, a fitting tribute to Dr Mahathir, the man who got Lima going 12 years ago.

And as sure as there will always be aeroplanes in the skies, and ships navigating the seas, Dr Mahathir's legacy will continue.

Already Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Prime Minister-in-waiting, has given the assurance that Lima will continue as one of Malaysia's premier events.

This is good news not only for Lima enthusiasts, but also for those involved in science and technology.

Moreover, the maritime and aerospace industries are of strategic importance to the country, and in fact, to the world. The increasing level of violence worldwide has made defence and security a national priority.

Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (Might), in its 2002 annual report, said: "The Government has paid much attention to the aerospace industry as it sees it as a provider of spin-offs in cutting-edge technology benefiting industries such as automotive and telecommunications."

The nation's entry into the space sector basically, according to Might, seeks to explore available scientific, technological and business opportunities.

The advanced technology in this sector will naturally create spin-offs in the areas of materials, electronics and software.

And events like Lima `03 - the best and the biggest yet - can amply provide the platform to meet the needs of the country through interaction and sharing of knowledge in relation to state-of-the-art technology.

More than 100 aircraft participated in the show this year, including some of the latest such as the Su-30MK, FA-18F Super Hornet, F-16CD, MIG-29N and Denel Rooivalk.

In addition, leading aircraft companies from the US, Europe and Russia made their presence felt with familiar names like Boeing, Airbus, Augusta Westland, Sukhoi, to name a few, prominently displaying their aircraft.

The maritime display also had the participation of at least 80 vessels, including warships, off the waters of Tanjung Malai. There was also a hydrofoil from Ukraine on show for the first time.

Many world leaders in shipbuilding and construction also took part this time around.

Lima gives the Malaysian maritime industry the platform to transform itself from the traditional outlook and activities into a dynamic and vibrant economic contributor as well as becoming a global leader.

Lima has soared way beyond what it was in 1991 with more than 800 companies and exhibitors from 25 countries taking part this year.

Overall, the number of visitors was estimated at more than 100,000.

No less important are the local counterparts. For example, the Composites Technology Research Malaysia (CTRM) and its Eagle surveillance aircraft system made a distinct presentation.

Developed in partnership with the Royal Malaysian Air Force, the Eagle ARV can be used in a "manned" configuration and it can also be flown "unmanned", controlled from a ground station.

CTRM ably demonstrated a significant capacity to manufacture and supply high technology composite components for the industry. Some of these were on show at Lima `03.

At the same time, the first marine engine to be made in Malaysia is also becoming a reality with the introduction of the "PSC Diesel Engine" by Penang Shipbuilding and Construction Sdn Bhd.

The engine is described as the engine for growth for the marine industry cluster, according to the official daily Lima 2003 on Tuesday, as envisaged under the Malaysian Second Industrial Master Plan.

Granted Malaysia is just starting out in the aerospace and maritime industries, but the smart partnerships forged during Lima will help the country rapidly up the learning curve.

New technologies, together with sub-contract manufacturing for example, can also lead to the growth of potential new export markets using local components where possible.

A comprehensive technology transfer and training programme will enable capacity building in design and manufacturing processes involving dynamic components and advanced composite rotor blades.

Over the years, Lima has availed such opportunities for Malaysia. Among the latest would be the possible establishment of a new training, technical service and maintenance centre in Malaysia for the Sukhoi Su-30 air-craft following the decision to purchase the aircraft.

All these strategic arrangements augur well for the country with the view to developing long-term partnerships to raise human resources and industrial standards.

Another significance of Lima `03 was the involvement of the newly-formed National Space Agency that was established in July last year to plan for and co-ordinate Malaysia's requirements in aerospace and satellite technology.

Under its umbrella, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and University Kebangsaan Malaysia were invited to exhibit their research work.

* The writer is Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia