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A high-flying defence showcase

FROM relatively humble beginnings in 1991, the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition has come a long way. Today, Lima is one of the foremost defence trade shows in the international calendar.

As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad noted in his opening address on Tuesday, the six-day event has attracted more than 800 companies, giving visitors a magnificent visual feast of some 100 aircraft and 80 vessels from 15 countries around the world.

The number of joint venture opportunities and spin-offs that can potentially come out of this biennial event makes it a worthwhile effort, indeed. Just as important to Malaysia and her neighbours is the prominent platform Lima gives to military aircraft and hardware.

As Dr Mahathir pointed out, many countries in the region are anxious to upgrade their air defences and acquire technology. Our long coastlines and an alarming increase in piracy are two reasons why we need more sophisticated aircraft, radar equipment and surveillance ships.

According to the International Maritime Bureau in its half-yearly report released recently, pirate attacks globally in the first half of this year reached a record high. Out of the 234 incidents, 21 oil tankers were attacked with most of them occurring in Indonesia and the Straits of Malacca. Even oil rigs are now vulnerable and need protection.

Apart from the wide array of aerospace and maritime products, Lima also allows Malaysia to show off a little. This is where we can demonstrate how capable we are of becoming a regional hub for manufacturing and marketing activities for civil and military aerospace and maritime products.

Just as there is great urgency to strike alliances for security reasons, there are also - through events like Lima - enormous opportunities to form strategic business partnerships at the local, regional and international levels. Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's assurances that Lima will continue into the future bode well for the expansion of such opportunities and the growth of Langkawi.