

01/10/2003

Roaring start for Lima (HL)

Ahmad A. Talib

LANGKAWI, Tues. - The Langkawi sky roared again with a spectacular aerobatic display by domestic jet fighters as Lima paid tribute to its creator and architect, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister, who spoke at the official opening at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre, was given a mid-morning aerial show by Royal Malaysian Air Force pilots led by Kol Affendi Buang.

RMAF chief Jen Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad took to the sky in a Alloutte-III helicopter with big, bold words Kerana mu Dr M on its side.

Dr Mahathir was taken to the viewing gallery of the complex to get a better view of the show.

Among the distinguished guests were the Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Cabinet members and heads of companies participating at the Seventh Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition.

The first Lima was held in 1991. When it started, Lima was solely organised by Le Proton Lima, but organisation of the maritime exhibition was then given to HW Lima and held at the Awana Porto Malai jetty.

Later, after touring some of the exhibits at the Mahsuri complex, Dr Mahathir was hosted to lunch.

He then proceeded to Porto Malai to grace the maritime exhibition, where he was paid a glowing tribute in the form of a touching poem.

Written by Laksamana Madya (Rtd) Tan Sri Abdul Wahab Nawi, the poem, Tribute to the Great Sailor, was recited by Muhammad Amin Abdullah.

This year's Lima attracted more than 800 companies. More than 100 aircraft and some 80 vessels from 15 countries are on display during the six-day event.

At the official opening, Dr Mahathir said the shows invariably gave a prominent place to military aircraft and hardware.

"Many countries in the region are anxious to upgrade their air defences and acquire technology.

"Air defence and maritime defence are very important in Southeast Asia because most of the countries are made up of huge archipelagos with long coastlines and innumerable islands to be secured.

"Surveillance ships and aircraft are needed to ensure shipping in the region is safe, in particular from piracy. There is, of course, a need to secure territorial waters and economic zones.

"Oil rigs offshore are very vulnerable and have to be protected," he said.

Dr Mahathir said all these required considerable provisions in terms of air and maritime defence capabilities.

"Malaysia has built a series of radar stations along the western coast of the peninsular to enable us to oversee traffic along the Straits of Malacca.

"In addition, we are putting in more patrol boats and aerial surveillance," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Lima had provided a good opportunity for air and maritime industries to exhibit products to deal with the situation arising not just from the threat of terrorism and war but also problems posed by rapid growth in the air and marine transport trade.

He said it also offered ample opportunity to exhibitors, industry players and government officials to view and consider the impressive array

of military hardware and civilian equipment on display.

Lima, he said, was also an excellent platform for exhibitors to market their products to Malaysia and the region, and they should avail themselves of the opportunity to network to form strategic partnerships and alliances, including joint ventures with local companies.

"At the same time, we hope your participation will also provide a better understanding of our local industrial capabilities and the investment opportunities and incentives provided by us, in our desire to make Malaysia a regional hub for manufacturing and marketing activities for civil and military aerospace and maritime products," he said.

Noting that a significant number of Malaysian companies were participating in Lima `03, he said these companies sought to form jointventure opportunities with foreign companies that had expertise in sophisticated technologies.

"And they have knowledge and insight into markets of Southeast Asia.

"Thus, mutually beneficial results could arise from co-operation between Malaysia and foreign companies," Dr Mahathir said.

He also said Lima had benefited, and would continue to benefit, Malaysia and the Asia Pacific region, which was 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\$70 billion (RM266 billion) between 2002 and 2006. And it is expected to continue rising.

"We are confident that the Lima series will continue to be held biennially to meet the objectives for which it was first mooted," Dr Mahathir said.

On another note, he said that after Lima `01 a wave of uncertainty had swept across the world in the wake of the increasing threat of terrorism and military action and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome outbreak.

These had slowed down the world economy as well as the air travel and tourist industries and caused diminished demand for aircraft, especially commercial aircraft.

But there were now signs that the East Asia travel trade was making swift recovery, said the Prime Minister.

"Tourists arrivals in Southeast Asia are regaining their pre-SARS and pre-Sept 11 levels. This will lead to increase demand for commercial passenger aircraft in Asia," he said.

Dr Mahathir said orders for new aircraft by low-cost airlines had outstripped those by normal-cost airlines.

"Malaysia has its own low-cost airline (Air Asia) and it appears to be doing very well," he added.