

01/10/2003

Show kicks off with dazzling aerobatics

WITH throttles at full military power, six Royal Malaysian Air Force MiG-29N Fulcrums screamed in low and fast over the Mahsuri International Convention Centre to begin their display on the first day of the seventh Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition 2003.

The show had opened earlier with a low-level flyby by three RMAF Northrop RF-5E Tigers, followed by a flight of six Boeing F/A-18D Hornets from the 18th Squadron based in Butterworth.

The audience included Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other high-ranking government officials.

As the six Fulcrums reefed into a lazy right turn, and exited show centre, the two solos peeled off to the left and right of the formation to set up their routine.

The main formation kicked things off first with a wingover, followed by two oblique loops, right in front of the viewing gallery of the convention centre.

As the four-ship diamond exited show centre, the solos picked up the pace, piling on the Gs as they showcased the type's agility.

Coming in from the left side of the runway at 45 metres, the lead solo made a high-speed, low-level run, yanked back on the stick and left some serious vortex in its wake with a 6g climb. The Fulcrum is stressed for 9Gs.

Riding on some 40,000 pounds of thrust from its two Klimov RD-33 afterburning turbofan engines, the Fulcrum clawed for the sun, punching off magnesium flares as it went along before pitching over as its airspeed bled off.

The four-ship diamond picked up where the solo left off with a perfect low level flyby. Tucking in nice and tight, the four thundered above the stand, went vertical, grabbed the sky faster than a Saturn V rocket and rolled over at the apex and finished off the manoeuvre with a downward bomb burst.

Formation leader Kol Affendi "Apai" Buang's job was made easy, thanks to three rock solid wingmen who stuck to him like glue. The formation was precise and the flying was crisp throughout the entire routine.

One of the two solos kept things on a roll with a series of manoeuvres like the Cuban Eight, the split S, a half Cuban, Immelmans, the Derry turn and a beautifully-executed four-point roll.

One of the highlights of the routine was the opposing knife-edge pass where the two solos appeared to be flying in perfect line abreast formation and then suddenly rolled their aircraft into each other. Viewed head on, the results were nothing short of spectacular.

While the MiG-29s were undoubtedly the star performers for that segment of the air display, the solo Hornet crew, comprising Mejar Zulkifli "Barry" Hamid and Kapt Khyril "G-Rough" Faizi provided some heart-stopping moments with a low-level, high-alpha flypast.

Pitching the nose up at 30 degrees, the Hornet trundled along at a leisurely 110 knots and was kept aloft purely on the thrust generated by the two General Electric F-404 engines.

One of the stars of the show, the Boeing F/A-18F began the display with both burners blazing and a short take-off run with a "dirty roll" thrown in to demonstrate the phenomenal thrust output of the General Electric F-

414-400 turbofan engines.

The display was flown by Boeing test pilot Ricardo Traven using one of the aircraft belonging to VFA-122 "The Flying Eagles".

Rounding off the performance were the Royal Air Force's Red Arrows with their nine BAE Systems Hawk jets. Formations included the trademark Diamond Nine and the Concorde.

The team's Synchro Pair kept the pace going with some aggressive manoeuvring each time the main formation exited show centre to set up for their next routine.