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Smooth sailing with Lada

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EVER since the first Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition in 1991, the Langkawi Development Authority (Lada) has played an instrumental role in ensuring the event proceeds smoothly.

It is a facilitator and provider of sorts for Lima, making sure there are enough hotel rooms for participants and extra government staff on the island and providing infrastructure to display aircraft and ships.

"We are the local agent for the Defence Ministry and private companies which sponsor Lima," said Lada deputy general manager Bakar Din.

He related how at the first Lima in 1991, the agency realised there were not enough hotel rooms in Langkawi and hurried to get a hotel built in time for the defence exhibitors and military buffs who would be descending on the island in December.

The result was the 300-room Hotel Delima at Kuala Muda, which was built in four months.

"We expedited it by getting a developer and fasttracking the approval of the land," said Bakar, who was previously deputy chairman of the Langkawi District Council.

Through its efforts, Lada has increased the island's hotel room capacity from 2,000 in 1990 to 7,000 today, enough to accommodate the more than 10,000 exhibitors and participants who are expected to throng the event and the island come Sept 30. Lada was formed in 1990, under the Finance Ministry through the Langkawi Development Authority Act 1990.

Besides developing the island into a holiday and vacation destination, the agency is also tasked with enhancing the socio-economic status of Langkawi's inhabitants.

Its function at this year's Lima is to head the infrastructure, health and hygiene committees and to co-ordinate the needs of the exhibition.

Aside from ensuring there are enough hotel rooms, Lada has also done a lot to build adequate facilities for displaying fighter jets and warships.

"We built the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre (MIEC) in Padang Mat Sirat in 1993 to house aerospace exhibits," he said.

The RM65 million centre was further expanded in 1999 to make more room for displays.

Lada is also responsible for providing the large "aprons" that display the aircraft at Lima.

The agency also built the Tanjung Lembong Port in 1998, which has been instrumental in easing the transportation of material supplies to the exhibition's venues of Porto Malai and MIEC.

"Instead of going to the Kuah jetty, the supplies from Kuala Kedah, Penang and Kuala Perlis which come in containers head straight for Tanjung Lembong and from there to MIEC and Porto Malai," he said.

Aside from providing infrastructure, Lada also co-ordinates the accommodation and transportation of extra medical, police, fire and rescue and municipal council personnel.

"These people are taken from all over the country, and we are the ones who take care of their needs, from accommodation to any equipment that they need," he said, adding that 400 extra government staff would be needed for this year's Lima.

In addition, Lada with the Ministry and the Prime Minister's Department's International Conference Secretariat also organises the itinerary for foreign delegates from the moment they arrive.

"We help plan their activities on the island, one of which is bringing them to Laman Padi in Pantai Cenang, an information centre on rice cultivation, so that they can get first-hand knowledge of rice cultivation and harvesting," he said.

For this year, Lada and the ministry will organise something unique: a thank you dinner on Oct 3 for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will be attending the event in his capacity as the country's premier, for the last time.

"The dinner is usually held in recognition of staff which served during Lima. But this year, we won't only be thanking the staff.

He said the agency ordered food for 20,000 people and everyone - from participants, staff, and residents - had been invited. Siti Nurhaliza has been invited to sing at the event.

"Looking at Lada's role in LIMA, the exhibition could go on without Lada, however it would be hard to host without the agency's help."