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PRIME NEWS

Need to buy new ships, aircraft

LIMA EXHIBITION: PM says govt has identified maritime and aerospace industries as key sectors to support

LANGKAWI

THE Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition is poised to become a gateway for defence spending by the Asian market, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday.

The prime minister said the exhibition was well situated to take advantage of the growth in military spending in Southeast Asia which went up by 13.5 per cent last year, with Asian defence spending set to overtake Europe for the first time.

"Military modernisation programmes continue to drive defence spending in Asean. (The) acquisition of ships and aircraft, drones and armoured vehicles will continue to be the focus of procurement within the region and form the majority of defence procurement spending until 2020," he said when launching the 12th Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition (Lima 2013) here.

Najib said Lima was important for Malaysia as the government had identified the maritime and aerospace industries as key sectors for investment and support.

He said the launch of the Malaysian Shipbuilding/Ship Repair Industry Strategic Plan 2020 at the last edition of Lima and the recent inclusion of the industry in the Economic Transformation Pro-



Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Najib Razak** (second from right), his deputy, **Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin**, and **Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor** at the 12th Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition in Langkawi. Pic by Effendy Rashid

gramme were clear acknowledgement of its importance, not just in accelerating Malaysia's growth but also in providing high-income jobs.

"We have also pushed aviation to the centre of our industrial policy. Through the Malaysian Aerospace Council, we have steered the development of the aviation industry."

Najib said the aviation industry had grown from RM8.2 billion in turnover in 1998 to RM30 billion, with more than 230 active companies and a workforce of 65,000.

Last year, he said the aerospace industry recorded RM2.3 billion in investments, creating 2,700 new jobs.

"Situating as we are in the heart of one of the most vibrant maritime and aerospace markets, with strong connections to Asia and an

open business-friendly economy, I believe the future prospects for growth are strong."

As expected, Najib began his speech by touching on what must have been on his mind for the last month or so — the intrusion in Sabah by gunmen.

"I stand before you today in unique circumstances. I have served as defence minister, as deputy prime minister and now as prime minister. I have spoken at this exhibition and others like it but this is the first time I have done so while an internal security situation is ongoing.

"Six weeks ago, a group of armed militants landed on Borneo's eastern shore pursuing a grandiose territorial claim that is without merit or basis in fact.

"It was the beginning of the biggest internal security threat since the communist insurgency ended in 1989."

As former defence minister, he said he had made big decisions on

defence procurement and policy and advised forces and companies on spending and strategies.

"These were big questions. They involved potential loss of life and deployment of national resources," he said, mentioning the country's decision to send troops on peace-keeping missions under the United Nations' umbrella to places like Bosnia, Somalia and Lebanon.

Nothing, he said could adequately prepare someone for a situation like the Sabah incursion.

"I urge the men and women currently on duty in Sabah to remain steadfast and vigilant. Our prayers are with you always."

Najib also paid tribute to those who had fallen in Ops Daulat in Lahad Datu and Semporna, adding that it was the responsibility of the government to ensure that its security forces were provided the best equipment the country could afford and to show that the lives lost in protecting Malaysia's sovereignty were not lost in vain.

"You shall not be forgotten."

Yesterday's opening ceremony was held on the tarmac of the Langkawi International Airport, the first time since Lima's inception in 1991.

The ceremony was followed by a short show by 22 Royal Malaysian Air Force — the F-5E Tiger, MiG-29N Fulcrum, Sukhoi SU-30MKM, Boeing F/A-18D Hornet, BAE Systems Hawk and Aermacchi jets and Eurocopter EC-725 Cougar helicopters.

Page 1 pix: Malaysia's **Krisakti aerobatics team** going through its routine over the **Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre** on the first day of the Lima exhibition yesterday. On the tarmac are **Dassault Rafale multirole fighters** of France's **Armee de l'Air**. (Inset) **Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak** (right) and his deputy, **Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin**, watching the aerobatics display at the opening of Lima.