

SPEECH BY: DATO ' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD

(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE OPENING CEREMONY OF HELI ASIA 98

PLACE: MINES EXHIBITION & CONVENTION CENTRE, SUNGAI BESI, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE : 27 OCT 1998

TIME:

It is always a particular pleasure to welcome visitors to our country. It is an even greater pleasure

to welcome them back. HELI-ASIA 96, which we were privileged to host in Malaysia two years ago, is now established as a truly prestigious event in the calendar of the helicopter industry, comparable with the ones in Europe and America.

2. HELI-ASIA is a dedicated helicopter exhibition covering both civil and military operations. It offers manufacturers and suppliers access to both markets and is the biggest such promotional event in the Asia Pacific region.

3. HELI-ASIA 96 is a hard act to follow but I am confident that the next few days will enhance its reputation further. In fact, looking at the programmes, there are already a number of innovations improving on the original model. For example, the workshops, the static display and opportunities for flying demonstrations at Sungei Besi.

4. You have chosen to come here at a very difficult time. It is a moment of history when the support of our friends is most timely and will be remembered. It is all the more heartening to learn that HELI-ASIA 98 has attracted over 100 exhibitors and that some 3,000 visitors are expected representing some 35 countries.

5. I have no wish to dwell on Asia's economic woes except to liken them to a period of turbulence familiar to anyone in aviation, this one being particularly prolonged and painful. But, as you know, you can survive turbulence to find a way ahead to clearer skies. Those of you who are here looking for commercial opportunities are right to do so based on a belief in the long-term future of this region. Your confidence will not be misplaced.

6. Specifically, we believe there is a growth market for helicopters and helicopter components. We are looking at an unusual, not to say unique craft, with a wide range of specialised uses, some special to this kind of aircraft only. This can be brought home to us in very forcible and dramatic ways. You will all recall not too long ago, the devastating forest fires that raged through Florida. And for once the media reports were not exaggerated. Helicopters being configured for fire fighting operations were to the forefront in the massive damage control effort. No other craft could get in so close to the disaster areas.

7. We ourselves in Malaysia have good cause to appreciate this. Last year we were victims of haze caused by forest fires in a neighbouring country. Again, helicopters came into play. Happily, as you will have already experienced, there has not been a recurrence of the problem this year. There is no haze but blue skies and good Malaysian sunshine to greet our visitors.

8. There was one occasion last year when we were indebted to the unique properties of the helicopter. Its suitability for search and rescue operation was amply demonstrated in lifting to safety the victims of a climbing expedition on Mount Kinabalu by the RMAF.

9. These are some of the ways in which the helicopter is capable of life saving and other hazardous operations not possible to conventional aircraft. At the same time, it is a very versatile machine with a multiplicity of uses. Malaysia, where parts of our country are still fairly inaccessible will find the helicopter invaluable, from flying doctor service to political campaigning. We have extensive oil and gas operations offshore to which access is again most often by helicopter. Its uses in reconnaissance work is also an accepted part of defence and military operations whilst increasingly it is used for commercial transport.

10. An exhibition of this kind puts on show the full range and scope of helicopter activities. It provides the most essential, up-to-date leading edge information on technical and operational developments in the industry. In any business, information is the key. Leading aviation and defence journals will be covering the event. Exhibitors will be assured therefore, of a wide exposure for their products and services. This is a premier business event bringing suppliers and users face to face. The rest is up to you.

11. I would like to end by taking a forward look at the smoother air ahead and the hopes for the future. We have less than 400 days to the next millennium. The future world in the 21st Century will be predicated on

globalisation and technology. We in Malaysia welcome globalisation and new technology. We are very ready receivers of it and here I appeal to the big names in the international helicopter industry who are represented in this room. We wish to develop further our aerospace and aviation businesses. I hope therefore you will look not only at the market place created by an exhibition of this kind but also at the scope for manufacturing your products in this country. Initially perhaps the wide range of components on which you depend. We can promise you the necessary support base of engineering skills that makes this possible. In fact, our radar may look ahead to the day when Alexander Shephard will organise the HELI-ASIA that will feature helicopters made in Malaysia. This is the sort of globalisation we like.

12. In the meantime, there is much to enjoy in the present exhibition. Malaysia is justly proud of its conference facilities. This year the organisers of HELI-ASIA have added a static helicopter display alongside the exhibition booths. Arrangements have been made for flight demonstrations at the Sungei Besi Airbase. Also new are the specialist workshops courtesy of the sponsorship of your industry leaders who will be sharing their advanced knowledge and expertise over a number of specialised areas. We very much appreciate their contribution.

13. On my part, I pledge the full support of the Government behind this event. It promises to be a very exciting and rewarding three days. And now it only remains for me to declare HELI-ASIA 98 officially open.