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Rakan Muda kit-plane wrecked

A RAKAN Muda kit-plane which was to take under-privileged children for joy rides was wrecked after the downdraft from a Royal Malaysia Air Force Nuri helicopter performing search and rescue demonstrations above the parked aircraft flipped it over yesterday.

The RM220,000 plane, a Zodiac experimental aircraft assembled by the Malaysian Experimental Aircraft Association, turned turtle with its propeller, canopy, cockpit and tail section completely wrecked.

The 400kg Zodiac is one of the 48 taking part in the five-day Langkawi Oshkosh East Fly-In convention and exhibition at the Langkawi International Airport at Padang Matsirat.

The Nuri pilot had just finished demonstrating an airlift and was flying backwards when the downwash from his helicopter flipped the Zodiac over.

The Sikorsky S-61 or Nuri, was from the 3rd RMAF combat search and rescue squadron based in Butterworth. The downdraft of a hovering Nuri can generate up to 30 knots of wind.

Three other planes, a Kedah Flying Club Cessna 172 and two SME MD3-160, were lucky not to have suffered the same fate as the Zodiac as they were all tied down.

MEAA secretary Major Razak Omar said the Zodiac pilot had gone to make some final arrangements with the teacher of the under-privileged students when the accident occurred.

The American-made Zodiac has clocked 20-hours of flight time after MEAA members completed assembling it nine days ago.

It was formally launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on July 28 in conjunction with the Great Malaysian Air Rally.

"We were all very excited to fly it to Langkawi for the Fly-In...it is very disappointing this accident had to happen," he said.

The Department of Civil Aviation has launched an inquiry into the incident.

Langkawi DCA manager Tahir Saleh said the incident would not mar the planned daily airshows.

"This is an isolated incident ... the daily airshows will go on as scheduled," he said when met at the scene.

Yesterday's accident brings to five the total number of aircraft damaged at the exhibition.

On Sunday, four microlights were damaged after a freak storm hit the island. The aircraft belonged to the Microlight and Flight Park of Batu Pahat and Pens Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of the Perlis Development Corporation.

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