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Air Unit gets fire-fighting helicopters

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Two Russian-made dedicated helicopters for fire-fighting and rescue operations were handed over today to the newly-formed Air Unit of the Fire and Rescue Department in a ceremony witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The two MI-17 IV copters were handed over by chairman and president of Airod Sdn Bhd, Tan Sri Ahmad Johan to Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh at the Airod facility in Subang, near here.

Dr Mahathir who, an Airod statement said, mooted the idea of having the dedicated helicopters, later named the helicopters Pekaka (kingfisher) and Enggang (hornbill).

Airod supplied the Kazan-manufactured helicopters and fire fighting equipment in three months, thus realising its contract with the Government in record time.

Officials said the helicopters would be in operation for the 16th Commonwealth Games from tomorrow.

They will be operated by Royal Malaysian Air Force flight crew - six pilots and six flight engineers had been seconded to the Air Unit - and the Fire and Rescue Department

Ting told reporters that the helicopters - acquired at US\$5 million (RM19 million) each - would only be fully-operational in about six months. Their uses would, in the interim, be confined to transport and rescue operations.

Additional equipment would have to be installed to get the helicopters ready for fire-fighting operations. Such equipment includes the "bambi bucket" with a capacity of 3,000kg of water and chemical dispensers. Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar was also present.

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