

10 SEP 1998

Mahathir-Rescue

FIRE AND RESCUE DEPT GETS TWO CHOPPERS FOR ITS AIR UNIT

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today witnessed the handing over of two Russian MI-17 1V helicopters to be used by the newly-formed Air Unit of the Fire and Rescue Department.

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

Dr Mahathir then named the helicopters "Pekaka" (kingfisher) and "Enggang" (hornbill).

Airod, in a statement, said the contract between the government and Airod for the supply and maintenance of the Kazan-manufactured helicopters and fire-fighting equipment was realised in record time before the start of the Kuala Lumpur '98 Commonwealth Games, here.

The helicopters will be operated by the Royal Malaysian Air Force crew and the Fire and Rescue Department for fire-fighting and search and rescue operations.

The statement said the introduction of the dedicated helicopters was the brainchild of the prime minister for fire-fighting and rescue operations in highrise buildings and for quick response to combat forest fires and other emergencies and natural disasters.

As a long-term development programme, Airod would undertake in-house enhancement of the MI-17 1V helicopters with fitment of equipment such as Doppler System, Weather Radar, Global Positioning System and Forward Looking Infra Red and other communication and navigation systems.

The MI-17 1V has a maximum take-off weight of 13,000kg and normal cruise speed of 240km/h (129 knots). It has a flight range of 458 nautical miles and maximum payload of 4,000kg in normal take-off conditions,

Its maximum underslung payload capability is 5,000kg.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Ting said RM59 million had been allocated for the purchase of the helicopters and fire-fighting and rescue equipment.

He said that for the time being, the helicopters would only be used for limited purposes such as for transport and rescue operations.

Additional equipment would have to be installed to get the choppers ready for fire-fighting operations.

"It would be ready and fully operational in six months," he said.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, who was also present, said the RMAF would provide the crew for the helicopters until the Fire and Rescue Department had trained its own personnel.

-- BERNAMA

ES JK