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2 Russian helicopters for fire, rescue services dept

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THE Government yesterday received two Russian M1-17-1V helicopters which will be used by the Fire and Rescue Services Department to combat forest fires and rescue services following natural disasters.

The purchase of the helicopters come under the department's RM119 million allocation under the Seventh Malaysia Plan. Of the total, RM60 million will be spent for airborne fire-fighting equipment including the two Russian helicopters.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh received the helicopters from Airod Sdn Bhd chairman and president Tan Sri Ahmad Johan in a brief ceremony at Subang.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad performed the blessing ceremony on the helicopters and named them "Perkaka" (kingfisher) and "Enggang" (hornbill).

Ting, speaking to reporters after the ceremony, said the helicopters will be used to form the airborne unit of the Fire and Rescue Services Department.

"For the time being, the helicopters will only be used as rescue and transportation. It is not equipped with airborne fire-fighting equipment yet.

"We expect it to be ready for fire-fighting operations in six months," he said.

"Perkaka" is a new helicopter while "Enggang" was built in 1991. It is understood that a new "green" M1-17-1V helicopter is priced close to US\$5 million (US\$1 = RM3.80).

The helicopters will be operated by flight crews from the Royal Malaysian Airforce seconded to the Fire and Rescue Services Department, pending the formation of an air unit in the department.

The twin engined helicopter manufactured by Kazan Helicopter Services in Tartarstan will operate with total support from the Airod facility.

As a long-term development programme, Airod will undertake in-house enhancement of the M1-17-1V helicopters with equipment such as Doppler System, Weather Radar, ATC Transponder, Global Positioning System and Forward Looking Infra Red and other communications and navigation systems.

The M1-17-1V has a maximum takeoff weight of 13,000kg and normal cruise speed of 240 km/h. It has a flight range of 458 nautical miles and maximum payload of 4,000kg at normal takeoff conditions.

Its maximum underslung payload capability is 5,000kg.

RMAF Major Abd Razak Ahmad, a co-pilot for the test flight seconded to the Fire Services Department said, six pilots and flight engineers underwent a two month training programme with Kazan Helicopter.

"The engine output is better than some in the medium lift category which normal carries three tonnes. This helicopter is equipped to carry five tonnes of water.

"The Sri Lankan airforce had also carried 72 people on board in the 60 seater helicopter, excluding the four crew," Abd Razak said, adding that the helicopter is also equipped with chemical dispenser such as a modified airborne fire-fighting equipment.

Besides Malaysia, the Russian helicopters are widely used in Myanmar, Laos, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, African countries and Egypt.

Later when speaking at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur after a briefing and presenting contracts to contractors and companies for

projects under the ministry, Ting said the RM119 million allocation for the Fire and Rescue Services Department had initially been deferred due to the economic situation.

"We have reinstated it," he said.

Besides modernising equipment for the Fire and Rescue Services Department, the Ministry will spend the allocation develop and upgrade other infrastructure and equipment facilities for the Department.

The budget will focus on the setting up of new Fire Department stations and quarters nationwide as well as purchasing of equipment.

The Government has granted contracts to companies to construct 19 new stations which cost between RM6 million and RM7 million each in the period of 18 months.

Besides building the new stations, the contractors will also build 368 units of quarters for the Fire and Rescue Services Department's personnel and their families.

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