

# Storm forces **Asean** friendship mission to divert from plan

STAR 12 AUG 2001

■ By SIMON KHOO

VIENTIANE (Laos). The Asean Voyage of Friendship 2001 (northern route) had to divert from its original plan to fly to Hanoi as a result of tropical storm *Usagi*, which is expected to hit Vietnam within the next 48 hours.

The two Zodiac light experimental aircraft assembled by Kakan Muda volunteers - the 9M-ERA and 9M-ERM - would now instead fly straight to Phnom Penh on Tuesday.

The project's special envoy, Abdul Latif Endot, who was supposed to pilot the aircraft from Wattay International

Airport here to Vietnam, said they would have to change and divert the flight schedule.

"We were told by the authorities that it would be practically impossible to take off in this kind of weather.

"Our main priority is safety and as such we will not take risks," he said yesterday, adding that despite the setback, they would still proceed in their attempt to deliver by hand the official invitation scroll for the 21st SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur next month, to Cambodia and Thailand.

The voyage had earlier been also affected by bad weather, when attempting to enter Yan-

gon in Myanmar (the first stop on Wednesday via Phuket and Mergui, leaving them stranded in Kawthoung before finally reaching their destination after numerous tries.

But during the flight from Yangon to this capital (the second stop) on Thursday, favourable weather coupled with good piloting skills saw them land ahead of schedule.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched the expedition on July 14, as part of the Rakan Muda aviation development programme and in conjunction with the coming Merdeka Day celebrations.