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Games invitations to `take off' on Saturday

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The three light aircraft which will fly to Asean capitals to deliver invitations to the 21st SEA Games to be held here in September, will take off on Saturday.

The aircraft - comprising two Zodiac CH 601 HD kit planes and one MD-3 Aero Tiga - manned by 16 junior pilots and three professional pilots, will visit Bandar Seri Begawan, Manila, Jakarta and Singapore.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to officiate at Saturday's ceremony at the Royal Malaysia Air Force base in Sungai Besi.

The flight, called Asean Voyage of Friendship 2001, will take off a day earlier than scheduled.

Only three Malaysian aircraft are taking part, instead of eight as originally planned.

Three Singapore Youth Flying Club Piper PA 28 Warrior aircraft with 11 crew members are expected to arrive tomorrow, and join the flight until Singapore.

They will then rejoin the voyage in Bandar Lampung in Sumatra on July 28.

Dr Mahathir will also launch Malaysia's attempt to create the world's longest banner measuring 15km. The current record is held by India (10.15km).

The idea to fly the invitation letters was mooted by Abdul Latif Endut, who flew one of two Zodiacs 745km across the South China Sea from Kuching to Tioman island on April 4, bearing the SEA Games torch.

Abdul Latif, who is principal private secretary to the Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, will be one of the special envoys during the 20-day voyage.

There will be 13 scheduled overnight stops throughout the journey until Aug 2.

The northern sector covering Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam is expected to commence at a later date.

The voyage is organised by the Youth and Sports Ministry and assisted by the Defence Ministry, Wisma Putra, the Department of Civil Aviation, Information Ministry, and Science, Technology and Environment Ministry.

Technical support and coordination is handled by Kenari Technology Sdn Bhd, principal partner of the Youth and Sports Ministry's Rakan Muda Air Recreation Programme.

Kenari Technology operations manager and the flight's operations coordinator Mohammad Mohd Ali said Malacca had been chosen as the alternative stopover for all the aircraft if the flight could not reach Senai in time, as they were not equipped for night flying.

Mohammad said the preparations involved ground reconnaissance, servicing the aircraft as well as positioning fuel refills at the various stops, adding that the Zodiac was not "fussy" as it ran on ordinary unleaded automobile petrol.

However, the MD-3, which was built by SME Aviation Sdn Bhd in Subang, only ran on aviation fuel which was harder to obtain.

This aircraft, he said, would require 18 refuelling stops throughout the journey.

The public, Abdul Latif said, is invited to participate in a carnival at the RMAF base on Saturday from 9am.

The event line-up includes a Sanwa Aero Model air show, joy rides, static display, parachute jumps and go-cart racing.

The public is invited to come as there are many prizes to be won.

Abdul Latiff said only a small fraction of the targetted RM3 million has been raised so far and the organisers welcomed corporate and individual support.

For details, contact Abdul Latif at 03-26932255 or fax: 03-26932231