

11/08/2001

Laos gets Sea Games invite from Rakan Muda official

Patrick Sennyah in Vientiane, Laos

RAKAN Muda director Suroya Selamat yesterday presented an invitation to the President of the Laos Sports Committee Dr Phouthong Seng Ak-Hom for him and the people of his country to attend the Sea Games in Kuala Lumpur in September.

The handing-over ceremony was the highlight of the Asean Voyage of Friendship which is to ensure that each Asean country gets a personal invitation scroll on their soil from the Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein.

Yesterday, the two Rakan Muda experimental aircraft - Zodiac 9M-ERA and 9M-ERM - along with the support entourage on board a Royal Malaysian Air Force CN235, touched down at the Wattay International Airport here.

The Zodiacs were piloted by senior pilots and assisted by Rakan Muda volunteers.

The senior pilots who took turns piloting the Zodiacs say this leg of the voyage, which is the northern route, was the toughest. This was because of the high terrain and poor weather conditions.

The two Zodiacs had safely completed the southern leg consisting Jakarta, Indonesia and Singapore earlier.

Phouthong in his speech said he was deeply honoured with the personal invitation from Hishammuddin through Suroya. He described the gesture as heart warming and said it was a step in further strengthening ties between the two countries.

Also present was Malaysian Ambassador Tai Kat Meng.

The Asean Voyage of Friendship was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on July 14 as part of the Rakan Muda Aviation Development Programme.

Before Laos, the entourage had visited Myanmar and will proceed to Vietnam, Cambodia and then to Thailand.

They will return to Malaysia on Aug 23.

The Zodiacs, assembled by Rakan Muda volunteers, are powered by a 100-horsepower (ERA) and 80-horsepower (ERM) engine respectively.

Maintenance engineers Supli Mat and Ahmad Dollah say the Zodiacs had been performing well despite being pushed to the limit.

Since the start of the Asean Voyage, the aircraft only needed minor maintenance work after every 25 hours of flying.

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