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Rakan Muda aircraft arrive in Myanmar town

Patrick Sennyah in Yangon

THE two Rakan Muda Zodiac aircraft, which left the Sungai Besi air force base on Sunday for the Asean Voyage of Friendship mission, arrived in Mergui, Myanmar, at 8am yesterday (Yangon time).

The aircraft reached Kwangthoung in Myanmar on Monday and were scheduled to leave for Mergui, 144 nautical miles away the same day.

However, according to Asean Voyage of Friendship co-ordinator Othman Harun, bad weather had hampered efforts to take off and the aircraft only left Kwangthoung this morning.

The two experimental aircraft, the 9M-ERM and 9M-ERA, were assembled by Rakan Muda volunteers and piloted by Kol Zakaria Salleh, Shahrizal Azley Suleiman, Affendy Syed Omar and B. Sivanesh.

Othman said the flight path of the two Zodiacs after arriving in Mergui was to depart for Yangon, more than 800km away.

However, he said, owing to the uncertainty of the weather, the route had been altered and the Zodiacs would fly to Bangkok tomorrow.

The journey is expected to take about three hours.

Meanwhile, the Rakan Muda participants and support entourage, including members of the media on board air force aircraft CN235, arrived in Yangon at 3.45pm (Yangon time) yesterday.

The objective of the Asean Voyage of Friendship is to ensure each Asean country gets a personalised invitation scroll on its soil from the Youth and Sports Minister's special envoy for his counterpart and the people to attend the Sea Games in Kuala Lumpur next month.

Dr Ahmad Othman, who is the director of the ministry's Skills Development Division, is scheduled to hand over the invitational scroll to Myanmar Sports Minister Brig Gen Thura Aye Mint in a brief ceremony later today.

Yangon is the first country of the northern route for the Asean Voyage of Friendship. Other countries are Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam.

The support entourage is expected to leave Yangon for Vientiane in Laos tomorrow where they will attend another handing over ceremony.

The two Zodiacs, upon their arrival in Bangkok tomorrow, are scheduled to refuel and leave for Vientiane where they will join the support entourage.

The Asean Voyage of Friendship 2001 was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on July 14 as part of the Rakan Muda aviation development programme.