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## Taking to skies in friendship

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THE "Asean Voyage of Friendship 2001" was launched at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur with a glittering land and air carnival two Saturdays ago.

Doing the honours was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The "friendship voyage" convoy will fly in three light aircraft, two of them experimental kit planes.

The kit planes are the Zodiac CH 601 HD, built by the Youth and Sports Ministry's Rakan Muda Air Recreation programme participants in 1997.

One of them, with the registration number 9M-ERM, made it into the Malaysia Book of Records after it flew 745km across the South China Sea - from Kuching to Pulau Tioman - bearing the 21st Sea Games Torch on April 4, this year.

The pilot of the aircraft was Abdul Latif Endut, the principal private secretary to Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishamuddin Hussein.

Abdul Latif will be one of the special envoys to deliver official invitations to the Sea Games in September.

Dr Mahathir later viewed the planes and was introduced to the participants of the "friendship voyage".

The convoy comprises 16 junior trainee pilots, three professional pilots, two engineers, and search-and-rescue as well as logistics personnel.

Also present was newly-appointed RMAF chief Jen Datuk Sulaiman Mahmud.

Dr Mahathir also launched an attempt to build the world's longest banner measuring 15km.

The initiative is being shared by nine ambassadors of Asean countries and 12 heads of local universities, who will complete the first portion of the banner.

The rest of the banner will be sent to the other Asean countries to be completed and returned before the start of the SEA Games.

The effort is expected to enter the Guinness Book of Records. The current record is held by India, with a 10.5km-long banner.

Other side attractions at the RMAF base included Sanwa Aero Model Air Show, Rakan Muda SEA Games carnival, joy rides in helicopters, static display, parachute jumps, Sinar Rakan Muda TV3 concert, go-kart racing, BMX racing and in-line skating.

Huge crowds thronged the base to take a first-hand look at the aircraft taking part in the "friendship voyage" while they were parked on the tarmac in front of the control tower.

Aside from the Malaysian group, there are three Singapore Youth Flying Club (YFC) Piper PA 28 Warrior aircraft with 11 crew members led by Major Jonathan Seah.

The team had arrived a day earlier to participate in the voyage.

Seah said the club, which comes under the Singapore Ministry of Defence, trains youths aged 17 and above.

Club members can join the Royal Singapore Air Force, commercial airlines or continue flying with the club, he added.

He said the club was participating in the "voyage" to gain experience as well as meet other flying club members in the region, to help plan future joint activities.

Seah said the club had sent three aircraft to participate in the recent London-to-Sydney Air Race - in its Phuket-to-Singapore leg - adding that

it had proved an interesting experience for the group.

At the carnival, groups of visitors were seen lining up to try the go-karts for free.

Others took part in street soccer activities while many did not miss the chance to view the RMAF workhorse - the Nuri helicopter.

This included a chance to sit in the pilot's seat or dangle from its winch with the help of an airman.

A queue was also seen at the joyride counter where for RM50, visitors get to take a 15-minute ride in one of two helicopters available - a Boskym Udara Sdn Bhd Ecureuil AS 350 and a metallic red Bell 407 - belonging to Kenari Air Sdn Bhd.

Many must have suffered from neck cramps from constantly looking at parachuters descending from the skies. Each jumper carried the flag of an Asean member country.

Another attraction was a jet-powered remote-controlled plane which could do all the manoeuvres of a fighter aircraft.

It belonged to Jet Team Thailand which also performed during the last remote-controlled plane festival held at the RMAF Museum in July last year.

The first leg of the "friendship voyage" was cut short from 20 days to only eight days, covering Indonesia and Singapore, as the haze prevented flights across Kalimantan to Brunei, and Manila in the Philippines. The journey started on July 17.