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Thailand receives Sea Games invitation

Patrick Sennyah in Bangkok

THE final invitation to the Governments of Asean countries and their people to attend the Sea Games in Kuala Lumpur next month was handed to the Thai Government during a brief ceremony yesterday.

It was handed by Malaysian special envoy Nawawi Arshad to Thailand Olympic Council president Jeneral Yuthasak Sasiprapha.

Thailand is the final country in the Asean Voyage of Friendship's northern leg which kicked off on Aug 5 from Kuala Lumpur.

The first country visited was Myanmar, followed by Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Two Rakan Muda-assembled light Zodiac aircraft and a support entourage aboard an air force CN235 make up the team which will return to Malaysia on Aug 22 (Zodiacs) and Aug 20 respectively.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to receive the Zodiac 9M-ERA and Zodiac 9M-ERM at the Subang air force base.

Yesterday was a near disaster for the Zodiac 9M-ERA, piloted by expedition manager Abdul Latiff Endot and Mohd Khairul Kamarudin, when a broken exhaust caused the aircraft's fuel consumption to increase rapidly.

Abdul Latif said he did not know how the exhaust broke. He only realised that his fuel gauge was declining much faster than normal.

The two Zodiacs left Cambodia at 10.30am yesterday for Bangkok. Both aircraft, which arrived here at 2pm, had about 100 litres of fuel on board which is equivalent to about five hours of flying time.

"We calculated the distance we had to cover and the rate the fuel was declining and after taking into consideration all relevant factors decided that we could make the journey.

"We were also not left with much choice as we only realised (the problem) midway and did not have any landing strips in between," he said.

He contacted the Bangkok international airport for priority landing.

"The Thai authorities were very understanding and even diverted a Boeing 747 aircraft which had been cleared for landing to give us priority in consideration of our situation," he said, adding that the Zodiac would have probably landed in a padi field if the control tower had rejected the request.

Abdul Latif said besides the broken exhaust, the weather was also bad with scattered rains and thunderstorms along the journey.

Meanwhile, it was reported here by the deputy secretary-general of the Amateur Athletics Association of Thailand that the country's top decathlete had been injured earlier in the week when the minibus he was in collided with a lorry.

The injury has effectively ended Jivavuth Jampathong's hopes of winning the gold medal in the Sea Games.