

16/09/2002

Father and son share common passion for flying nation's carrier

Farrah Naz Karim

PETALING JAYA, Sun. - For Captain G. Tharmasegaran @ Kamaruddin Abdullah, 53, Oct 1 is an auspicious day.

Not only is he marking his third decade with Malaysia Airlines, but it will also be exactly 30 years ago that the company he has been with was declared the national carrier.

Being one of the 11 pioneer pilots who was recruited in 1972 by Malaysia Airlines after the Malaysia-Singapore Airways was dissolved, he is also one proud man to have established a father-and-son team when his third son, second officer Khairulirwan, 22, joined the carrier two years ago.

When met at the Malaysia Airlines Academy recently, they were only talking about one thing - love for flying.

"It was my father's intriguing life that motivated me to join the airlines, even if it meant that I had to abandon my electrical engineering course I was doing midway.

"My dad has always been the figure for me to follow. As soon as I started out with the airlines I saw a clear perspective ... this is exactly what I have always wanted to do.

"My dad first brought me to the cockpit when I was seven, it was wonderful. But what I really wanted was to be in the front end. I wanted to fly the plane, to get the satisfaction when the engine whines to a stop after a smooth landing."

It was another 15 years before Khairulirwan finally got that opportunity and his first experience of manoeuvring a single-engined plane, in the air alone, was one he said was unforgettable.

A father of four, Tharmasegaran realised his son seriously wanted to take up flying when he was 16.

"It could be the money that he was attracted to back then, but the responsibility and the discipline that the job demands were what I taught him," he said.

After having succeeded in following in his father's footsteps, Khairulirwan has another mission to accomplish, to fly together with his father.

"It will probably take me at least another five years before I may stand to get that chance ... but I am looking forward to that day, that is a dream I hope to achieve before he retires."

Dubbing himself a greenhorn with 600 flying hours compared with his father's 16,000, Khairulirwan said having a father who is among the pioneer pilots does not mean that his career path is easy.

"He does not believe in pulling cables as he has faith in my potential. But the fatherly advice he divulges is essential for my self development."

Tharmasegaran has been blessed with a smooth-flying career in his years with Malaysia Airlines.

The only time he recalled that had caused him worry was during a flight from Singapore when the plane smelt of fumes.

"I made a detour to the airport and everyone was evacuated. Everything was all right but a little tense when a lady who thought she was the cause of the problem came up to me and 'admitted' she was the culprit as she was carrying chilli powder in her bag.

"Having the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) on board and chatting with him was also a great experience," he said.