

Brunei sultan pilots own plane to Delhi

Here is a ruler who believes in not only piloting the fortunes of his country but also his own plane - even during long haul flights. The Sultan of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah, one of the richest men in the world, flew his own Boeing 747 from his country's capital Bandar Seri Begawan to New Delhi.

And he does it even when he flies across the seas to the US, the flamboyant royal told a surprised Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed who went to receive him at the Air Force Station, Palam, Tuesday evening.

Ahamed, the minister in waiting for the sultan who is on four-day visit to India, reached on time. But waited, and waited for the visitor who seemed to be taking an inordinately long time to appear. When he did, he explained to the bewildered minister that he was coming out from the cockpit because he had been piloting the aircraft.

Bolkiah, 61 who also holds the portfolios of finance and defence in his island nation of 381,371 people, told the minister that he had flown the aircraft for five-and-a-half hours to reach the Indian capital. He had earned his pilot license from London in 1967.

The sultan, one of the world's longest serving monarchs who assumed the throne in 1967, is known for his lavish lifestyle. He reportedly owns around 5,000 cars and his auto empire includes 50 Rolls-Royce cars, eight McLaren's F1, six Dauer 962 LMs, the only right-handed Mercedes CLK-GTR in the world, a Lamborghini Diablo Jota, two Jaguar XJR-15, numerous Ferraris, Mercedes, Jaguars, Porsches and Bentleys.

His palace is said to have 1,788 rooms and he has also built mosques with touches of gold and diamonds.

This is the first visit by the sultan to India in over a decade. Brunei, which does not have any indigenous industry, is likely to pitch for more trade and investment from India. It is increasingly looking at India as a knowledge power and is keen on expanding the Indian presence in its IT sector.

Liz Mathew (© IANS / India eNews)