

Ex-mariner refutes Menzies' claims

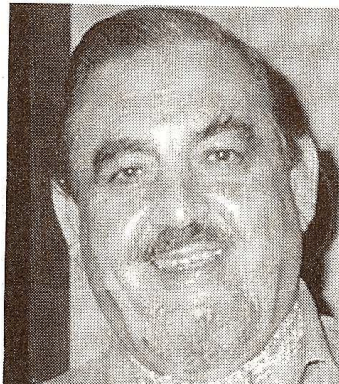
BY CHRISTINA KOH

IPOH: A former mariner has refuted claims by writer Gavin Menzies – that a mammoth Chinese fleet had sailed to the Americas over 70 years before Christopher Columbus travelled there – in a new book published here.

Ex-Canadian master mariner Capt Philip J. Rivers, 77, said ships sailing under the command of legendary Chinese Admiral Zheng He could never have sailed from western India to eastern Africa in June 1421, as claimed by the best-selling author.

"This would have been impossible as it meant sailing across the Indian Ocean in the teeth of the South-West Monsoon," said Rivers, when interviewed about his book, *1421 Voyages – Fact & Fantasy*, which will be launched at the Syuen Hotel here on Thursday.

The book is published by the Perak Academy, a non-profit



Rivers: Questioned the absence of foreign records of the fateful voyages

organisation, and is a direct challenge to Menzies' *1421: The Year China Discovered America*, which had sparked debate among historians worldwide.

"Menzies himself claims that junks were unable to sail into the wind and could only be driven behind the wind. (The ships) could never have left port," said Rivers, who has been interested

in the subject for 40 years.

In his book, Rivers outlined his doubts about some of Menzies' theories.

"For instance, there may be some East Asian objects among debris found along the west coast of the Americas, but this can be explained as accidental drifts," he said.

"Ocean currents can carry not just Chinese ships but Malay *perahu* and all sorts of Japanese fishing boats from far away."

Rivers said it was unlikely for the great Chinese ships used in the voyage to be 144m long, as cited by Menzies. Such ships, he said, would be unmanageable in the open ocean.

He found Menzies' claim to be puzzling that natives in Malacca were already tapping rubber in 1421 and that Zheng He had "established a temple there that is still used for worship to this day."

"The Cheng Hoon Temple built in 1646 is the oldest tem-

ple in Malacca," said Rivers, who also questioned the absence of foreign records of the fateful voyages although Japanese, Korean, Tamil and south Indian ships were said to have accompanied the Chinese fleets.

Rivers, who is married to a local woman and who now lives in Cameron Highlands, said his interest in ancient voyages was sparked by stories of Thor Heyerdahl and his team, who sailed a raft for 7,900km from Peru to Polynesia in 1947 to demonstrate that prehistoric explorers may have migrated across vast stretches of ocean.

"I am a great believer that the Chinese had reached the west coast of America long before the Europeans reached its east coast," said Rivers.

"But it would have been done over centuries – not in the 1421-1423 timeframe."

Enquiries about Rivers' book launch can be made with the Perak Academy at 05-242 5933.



Book launch

The Prime Minister's wife Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood and author Bridget Menezes (left) holding a motivational book entitled 'Self Empowerment' which the former launched at Angkasapuri in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The book is based on the current 'Self Empowerment' series conducted by Menezes on Radio 4 from Mondays to Fridays. — Bernamapic