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Mahathir-Everest

MALAYSIA WANTS TO CONQUER WORLD'S HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

KUALA LUMPUR, June 4 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight launched a national project aimed at making Malaysia the first Southeast Asian country to conquer Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain.

Under the Malaysia-Everest Project '97, a group of 20 mountain climbers will try to plant the Malaysian flag at the peak of the 8,848m-high mountain in May next year.

The project, estimated to cost RM4.5 million, is a brainchild of Dr Mahathir, who once said: "We must have confidence to achieve all of our dreams, this includes climbing the Everest, sailing across the Pacific, conquering the Arctic and Antarctic."

It is jointly organised by the Youth and Sports Ministry, Malaysian Climbing Association and Sports and Culture Foundation of Malaysia.

The ministry has allocated RM300,000 as permit payment to the Nepal government for the right to scale Mount Everest. The public and private sectors have been asked to contribute to make up the balance.

Of the 20 climbers selected by the Malaysian Climbing Association for the expedition, only 12 will trek to the top part of the mountain while the rest will act as a back-up squad.

Various programmes in preparation for the expedition started last year, including mountain-climbing training at Shingri Glacier in India and Mount Cook Aspring in New Zealand.

Sir Edmund Hillary and his guide Tenzing Norgay Sherpa became the first persons to reach the peak of Mount Everest on May 29 1953. -- BERNAMA

AFY YBY